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HOME DUTIES FOR
WIVES & MOTHERS



MRS DONALDSON





Home Duties for Wives and Mothers.

HOME DUTIES FOR
WIVES AND MOTHERS,

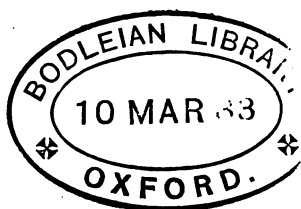
ILLUSTRATED BY
Women of Scripture.

BY
MRS. DONALDSON.
(St. Stephen's Vicarage, Spitalfields.)

With Introduction by
THE BISHOP OF BEDFORD.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE astonishingly rapid rise and progress of "Mothers' Meetings" is in itself sufficient evidence of their value. The older among us can remember the time when they were unknown, and now a large parish without a "Mothers' Meeting" is quite a rarity. It is seldom that some kind lady cannot be found ready, for the love of Christ, to gather together her poorer neighbours, and to read or talk to them as they sit at their needle-work. And thus it comes to pass, that one is continually being asked to recommend some book of simple instruction, and yet of sufficient interest, to read to a Mothers' Meeting. And suitable books are somewhat scarce. I was glad, therefore, to find that the wife of a hard-working East End

Curate had not only written a number of addresses upon the female characters in the Bible for reading to her "Mothers' Meeting," but that she was also encouraged to print them, so as to extend their usefulness to others. This little book is very simple and unpretending, which is just what one wants. Poor weary women, in such a population as that of East London, want very plain teaching, and very kind and loving words. And such the writer of this little book has sought to give them. I can only trust the readings will be as much appreciated by others as by the mothers of St. Stephen's, Spitalfields, and may be blest to many by giving them new and deeper interest in the manifold lessons to be gathered from the study of the lives and characters set before us in God's Holy Word.

WM. WALSHAM BEDFORD.

(Bishop Suffragan for East London.)

PREFACE.

I PUT these addresses into print with the sincere trust that the great Head of the Church may bless the reading of them to many souls.

Being myself a wife and mother, I have ventured to address the mothers who assemble in large numbers every week in the School Room connected with this large but very poor Parish, on some of the duties of wives and mothers.

Living, as I do, in the midst of those to whom I have spoken, and going in and out among them from time to time, I think I have had ample opportunity of knowing much of their outward

characters and habits of life; and I have become more and more convinced of the solemn responsibilities of parents, and more especially of the influence a *mother* has for good or for evil over her family. If her own heart be changed, and the value of the immortal soul be realized, surely she will fervently yearn for the salvation of her child. In these pages I have endeavoured, by Divine help, to set before them the examples of women of old, who have had difficulties and trials, joys and sorrows, such as theirs; some of whom shone forth as bright lights, not only to be admired, but to be hopefully and patiently followed. Others, on the contrary, serve only as sad and awful examples of duty neglected, opportunities wasted, and of responsibilities abused.

Many home-truths and personal applications, drawn forth by the experience of what I have seen and heard, will, I trust, be received in the same spirit of love which has prompted their

utterance. And that the Holy Spirit may carry home the words thus spoken in human weakness, and water the seed sown in the hearts of all who shall read these simple addresses, is the fervent prayer of

THE AUTHORESS.

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L

LOT'S WIFE;

OR,

Disobedience to God's Command in looking back.

B

I.

Lot's Wife.

Luke xvii. 32.

A VERY short injunction, yet one full of meaning and importance. The reason for keeping this woman in mind is not that we may admire and praise her, but, on the contrary, by recalling her wilful disobedience, and her deplorable fate we may learn to avoid her sin, and not to waver in our heavenward journey.

Let us consider briefly the outline of her history. We are told (Gen. xix. 16) that when the two angels came to Sodom to rescue Lot and his family, at the intercession of Abraham, before the wicked cities of the plain should be destroyed, that they laid hold of them each by the hand, and led them out of the city. Not only did they bring them forth before the work

of destruction began, but bade them all to flee to the mountain for safety, adding with deep meaning and affectionate caution, "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

Onward they sped to the city of Zoar, which was to be their refuge, when the wrath of the Almighty was to descend in awful vengeance on the inhabitants of those wicked towns. One short verse tells us, in thrilling distinctness, the sad tragedy that was enacted by the way: "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

Still in the neighbourhood of the dismal Dead Sea stands a rocky stone of salt, which, among the inhabitants of those regions, is known by the name of "Lot's wife." And as the passer-by looks at it he can almost fancy he can trace the outline of her veiled form as she seems to stand hesitatingly and timidly glancing round, to cast one longing look back at the scenes she has left. And there, in the very act of disobedience, that wrath from which she might have fled, strikes her on the spot. There she stands a monument to all future generations.

And as we look at the picture before us, we

shall do well, my dear friends, to gather a few important lessons from this woman's sad end.

She had been rescued, singled out, as it were, from among a multitude of sinners, being distinctly told what was going to be the fate of all in the city. Nevertheless, we find that she lingered by the way; her heart wandered back, it may be, to some of the things she had left behind. Perhaps she had other friends of whom she was thinking, or some possessions which she valued highly. We are not told what was the special cause of it; but that she first began to falter, to linger on the road,—then at last she paused as her husband and daughters hastened on, and once fallen back she lost the tones of their voices; and then her last fatal act was done. It may be that she wished or even intended to return, or, perhaps, she did not believe the word of the angels that the city was in danger. She obeyed not the command, but *did* look back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Such, then, dear friends, is the brief outline of this sad scene. We might fill it up in various ways, to endeavour to make the event appear even more real and solemn. But *this* is ample and plain enough for us at the present moment.

We feel, perhaps, surprised that the wife of such a man as Lot—righteous Lot, as he is called—should have erred in such a way. And some of us may be inclined to say, “I am sure that *I* should not have looked behind, nor lingered on the road.” But stop, I pray you, before you make this assertion. Let us not speak too hastily of our own strength of character. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Now, we are all dwelling in the city of destruction,—a moral Sodom: nay, more, we are under sentence of destruction ourselves, unless we, too, flee from the wrath to come,—yes, flee to the mountain, to the Rock of Ages, and take shelter in the city of refuge, even the Lord Jehovah Himself.

Perhaps too, like Lot and his family, we have required much urging by Christian friends to depart from the danger so near at hand. The Gospel has been preached and read to us, over and over again; God’s servants have spoken most earnestly and faithfully to us concerning our souls, and pointed out a loving and waiting Saviour. Or God has sent His own angels to speak to us the same message. He has laid us low on beds of sickness, and in the stillness of

the chamber of death He bade us flee from the wrath due to our sins. In sickness, in losses, and in afflictions, His still small voice has spoken the same words, and at last, perhaps,—I trust it is so,—we have obeyed the call. And though we may have needed even to be led forth, yet we have at length fairly left it all behind. Past sins, former friends, old pleasures, ill-gotten possessions,—all are given up, and, better still, if in the company of those we love dearest upon earth, we have all started together on the narrow path, with our faces Zionward.

So far all is well; but wait awhile. The road is long and dull, the path is straight and narrow, our feet begin to ache with the burning sand of the desert. Or, to speak more plainly, we find that the road to heaven is less easy than we anticipated. The danger which we thought so great seems less as our fears grow calmer; our ardour and zeal slacken, and Christian duties and privileges become less joyous, nay, almost irksome.

And sure I am, dear friends, if there be one here present who has ever reached this stage of the journey, that these same duties and privileges will soon be dropped; the company of God's people will be avoided, and thus the help to be

obtained by the advice, the experience, and spiritual converse of fellow-Christians will be lost.

When once we come to this point of the journey, and find ourselves alone, as it were, we not only lose the help of Christian communion in making progress in the right path, but the good influence is also lost which hitherto kept us from yielding to our old sins and temptations. We have hesitated, we have lingered, we have stopped behind like Lot's wife, and we shall soon be in the condition of the man described in the Gospel, "The last state of that man is worse than the first." If we are beginning to feel a vacancy within, we shall soon yearn for something to take the place of those good companions we have relinquished, and those blessed privileges which we have given up, and we shall without fail turn round to look back to the world which we had once so determinedly forsaken at the time of our first good impressions.

And think how dreadful such a position must necessarily be! What a fearful state of peril it involves! "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." To have our faces towards the world

is to have turned our backs upon heaven. To be looking and longing for the pleasures of sin, and to believe the deceitful, fair promises of the devil, is to leave behind us the joys of Zion and to disbelieve the gracious promises of a God who cannot lie. And, oh, how terrible to contemplate the state of such an one, if the dread vengeance of an offended God, of an angry Judge, should be launched forth, in the midst of such wilful sin and disobedience!

Now I would like to ask each of you here, dear mothers, Are you in this danger? Have you once set forth in the right path? It may have been in your youth, perhaps at your confirmation, or at some special season of trouble or of affliction; or perhaps it was later, when you married a godly partner, and in the first joy of the new life you were commencing, you both resolved to dedicate yourselves to God, and to live henceforth for Him. And, oh, how happy might you have been had you remained firm to your good resolves! You can call to mind how regularly you attended all the means of grace. You honoured God's day, you read His Word, you never missed attendance at His house; nay, perhaps you even knelt at His Holy Table. But,

one by one, all this was given up: Bible classes and mothers' meetings were no longer attended; gradually all the outward signs of open profession were forsaken, and the companionship of those whom you once so highly respected was lost, and you were left in loneliness and well-nigh despair. They had not given you up, but *you* had lingered behind.

Perhaps the loved husband with whom you had started so hopefully has been removed by death; or else the sweet children of your love have outstripped you in the race, and reached the goal long before.

But, sad to relate, in many cases, I fear, the bad example of the mother influences these loved ones, and causes them to follow in her steps. How fearful to think of the awful responsibility of a wife and mother!

I firmly believe that, in nine cases out of ten, where a husband turns out badly, it may be traced in some measure to the bad influence, or at least to the lack of a good influence of the wife. If her neglect has not driven him away, in the greater number of cases, I believe that the wife might have saved him and drawn him back, if she had used her influence aright.

And if the influence of a wife be thus great, how much greater even must be that of a mother! You know it is. Think, O mothers: is *your* influence over your children such as it ought to be? Do your authority and your example tally? Do you teach them what is right,—to serve God and keep His commandments, to attend His house, to study His Word? And do you do the same yourselves; or do they see you gradually neglecting these things, and therefore think there is no need for *them* to observe them? Ponder these things well, my dear friends: examine your own lives, and see whether you are in the right road yourselves, or whether you are beginning to linger behind; nay, even “looking back from behind.” If so, turn again, turn again with us, I entreat you, and “we will do thee good.”

But, before I close, I would most earnestly urge those of you who have never yet set out at all on the road to Zion to do so without delay. To remain behind is certain death: destruction is at hand, even at the door. Jesus has died; nay, is risen again, and bids all come to Him that they may find pardon for all their sins in His precious blood. He asks nothing of you: no

goodness of your own ; but simply to cast yourself on His mercy, and He will pardon and bless you. And while you look to Him in all dangers and difficulties, He will keep you safe in this world, and bring you at last to His eternal home in the world to come.

To all, then, I would say, "Escape for your life ; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed ;" for "remember Lot's wife."

II.

HAGAR;

OR,

The Sin of Fleeing from the Path of Duty.

II.

Hagar.

Genesis xvi. 8.

WE have before us, for consideration to-day, two questions, and very important ones they are. "Whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" The angel of Jehovah addressed them to Hagar as she sat by the fountain in the desert, on the way to Shur, which lay towards Egypt.

Now Egypt was her native place, so it is not unlikely that she intended to return to that country and to her own home. It was just as she sat wearied on the way, glad of the coolness of the trees always to be found near springs of water, and refreshing herself with the delightful streams so welcome to her parched lips. There still lay a long distance before her, and as her fatigue made the journey more and more trying, she, doubtless,

began to look back on the events which had brought her to this position.

Perhaps she began to regret the steps she had taken, and to hesitate as to what she should do ; when a solemn and gentle, yet sad, voice accosted her with the questions under consideration : "Whence camest thou ? and whither wilt thou go ?" It was evidently no stranger who thus accosted her, though she knew him not, for the speaker called her by name : "Hagar, Sarai's maid." Not Hagar the *Egyptian*. No, it was of the position from which she had fled that he wished to remind her ; not of the home of her youth, which had been left long since. She had been made one of Abram's household, and even so far exalted from servitude as to have been given by her mistress to Abram as his wife. But still she ceased not to be Sarai's maid, not even though she had fled from the face of duty. We may consider that by thus calling her by that title the angel intended to remind her that as such she had no business to be where she was.

"Whence camest thou ?" he asked, "and whither wilt thou go ?" Look back upon the past, consider the events which have brought you here, recall to mind all the advantages you have

enjoyed and might still be enjoying in Abram's house, and then compare them with your present position and the prospect before you.

Thus reproved, Hagar answered honestly the first question, though, it is evident, she wished to impart some degree of blame to her mistress as an excuse for her own folly. However, the command is plain and simple: "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands."

Before any blessing is promised, and the wonderful prophecy concerning her son was imparted, she must be willing to humble herself, and retrace her steps. But it was not only told her to return—that would be humiliating enough, but having done so, she must submit herself to her mistress—that would be far harder. Duty must be faced, however hard and however difficult, before a blessing can be obtained. But God would not send her back hopeless and dejected; He encouraged her with a wondrous promise for the future, and assured her that He had seen her affliction. It was true she had not taken it to Him, as she should have done, but nevertheless He had looked upon her in her trouble, with a pitying, loving eye. Well might she bear witness with holy rapture and thankfulness, and cry out

with awe, "Thou God seest me." The remembrance of this truth would carry her through all further trials and difficulties in the house of her mistress; and the hope which lay before her would strengthen her in the submission which she now saw was her plain duty.

And now, my dear friends, let us apply this subject, and especially these two questions, to ourselves to-night.

I solemnly ask each one of you to consider the question, "Whence camest thou?" You may answer that you come of most respectable parents, your family has always been sober, moral, and upright. It may be so,—nay, you may be all this yourselves at this moment, and yet I would tell you each and all that you come out of Egypt like Hagar. Indeed, though you know it not, you may still be there! If you are far from God, if your heart is enslaved by the things of this world, and subject to the still harder rule of Satan, you are in bondage still. If you have not cast off his yoke and received the adoption of a son and yielded yourself to the willing service of a new Master, even the Lord Jesus, bearing His name, and blessed with all the high advantages of one of His family, you have not left the land of your captivity.

But of some I am glad to know that it may be said that they have left Egypt and have become glad servants of the King of kings. Thank God it is so! Yet even for them it is well to consider whence they have come. It will fill their hearts with gratitude for their present happy state, and help them to walk more humbly with their God.

But I fear there are many, perhaps some here to-night, who, having once left Egypt and having enjoyed the privileges of adoption for a time, have also, like Hagar, fled from "the house of their mistress;" they have left their first love. Danger, difficulty, scorn, or unkindness, has driven them to give up all the blessings and advantages to which they should have remained faithful. The slightest difficulties by the way are too apt to make us flee from the face of duty, without considering the second question, "Whither wilt thou go?" Had Hagar been allowed to continue her way without hindrance and to return to Egypt, it would doubtless have caused her to give up her faith in, and the worship of, the true God, and she would once more have embraced the heathen religion of that nation, and have lapsed into idolatry.

And so with us, if once we wilfully give up the

advantage of dwelling amongst religious people, and withdraw from those who would help us on the narrow way, and absent ourselves from the public worship of God and the outward means of grace. If we do this we shall most assuredly soon return to the service of our old master, even the prince of this world, and all trace of true religion will vanish from our hearts. Now, my dear friends, ask yourselves this question, I beg of you, and answer it honestly as in God's sight to-night!

"Whence camest thou?"

Have you left your former good beginnings, and your high resolves and bright hopes, and are you gradually sinking lower and lower? Is each step taking you further from duty, from happiness, from peace, and nearer to ruin, despair, and eternal misery?

Pause, I entreat you, before you leave this room, and consider.

"Whither wilt thou go?"

Where are you determined on going? Surely not on to destruction, whither your steps are wending?

Turn, I beg you,—stop on that fearful path! You may never hear the warning voice again, it

may be the last, the *only* time that God will speak as He does to-night to each of you.

"Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands."

Repent this night, retrace your steps, turn round from the evil way, with your back on Egypt and its allurements and temptations, and your face towards Zion. Walk manfully along the road of Christian duty, and submit to all its indignities and its difficulties, remembering that the Lord seeth your affliction, and hath bright hopes in store for you.

Will you do this to-night, weary one? Will you close with the offer of mercy at once? God sees you and knows all your troubles. You may try to flee from them. It may seem to you as if anywhere would be better than where you are, that you cannot bear these trials any longer, that the path is too difficult for you—too narrow, and too rough, that the wilderness would be far better, that there you can rest by some cool and refreshing stream. But stop! God calls you and says, if you want to find that difficult path made easy, *submit* to His yoke. It is because your will is not in accordance with God's will that the path is so trying. Yield yourself unreservedly to Him

to make your will subject to His. Then look on, and look up; whatever may vex and trouble you now, there are far brighter prospects in store for you by and bye. Let faith and love soften your path, and hope gild the horizon, and you will not heed the petty annoyances of men by the way, nor seek to flee from them.

May God help you each and all to decide this matter to-night, before it be too late. Life is short and uncertain at the best. If death should come on you while you are still far from God, how fearful the thought of what must be your fate—your doom. There will be no opportunities *then* for returning from the error of your way. “*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.”

“But if you still the call refuse,
And all His wondrous love abuse,
‘Too late! too late!’ will be the cry,
Jesus of Nazareth *has passed by.*”

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by *now*, and says, in tones of pitying love, “Turn ye, turn ye, for wherefore will ye die?”

Accept His love, then, *now*; give up the past and all its burden of sin and sorrow; cast yourself now, oh wandering one, at His feet, and He will not cast you out!

III.

REBEKAH ;

OR,

*The Wickedness of Parents in Teaching their
Children to Deceive.*

III.

Rebekah.

Genesis xxvii. 8.

WE have before us a scene of deceit and subtlety. Isaac had grown old, and his eye was dim, so that he could not easily discover one person from another. Feeling his own growing infirmities, and that he must naturally prepare for death at any time, he designed to give his parting blessing to his first-born,—an act of the greatest importance in the patriarchal times. It is difficult to believe that he was ignorant of the Divine purpose, that the younger son should have this blessing. But we may suppose that he was governed more by natural affection than intentional disobedience.

It seems strange that Isaac should have loved Esau most, being the least religious of the two sons, and having already displayed so little regard

to his parents, and grieved them by intermarrying with the Hittites, who were heathens.

However, the old man called this favourite son, and telling him what his intentions were, bade him make him savoury meat, as was the custom at such ceremonies.

And now Rebekah comes upon the scene. We must not condemn her as a thoroughly bad woman on account of the part she took in this matter. The act indeed was bad and unjustifiable, though her design and object was possibly good ; but she should have taken other means to bring it about. She must have been aware that God had said that "the elder should serve the younger," and she feared lest her husband should endeavour to thwart the word of God. It was as if Rebekah thought that she could assist the Almighty to fulfil His own promise ; but the steps she took to bring it about were most discreditable to one professing any degree of religion.

And God left her to herself, not because He approved of her plan, or needed such an effort to be made to carry out His word. But He allowed it, as He often does allow the plans of the wicked to prosper, in order to fulfil His own designs.

We all know well, I think, the story before us,

how Rebekah suggests to Jacob, and even commands him, to hasten with the food she should prepare to his father, and to make him believe he was the eldest son, Esau. In order to achieve this, he had to be disguised by the skins of the goat, and the clothing of his brother, though even then the whole plot was nearly being discovered by Isaac's acuteness of hearing. To save this discovery, and in the fear of bringing upon himself a curse instead of a blessing, Jacob was obliged not only to act but to speak a deliberate lie.

And so the whole affair succeeded admirably; the food was eaten, the kiss and blessing were given, and all was safely over before Esau returned.

Sad was the scene, and bitter the wailing, when the truth became evident. A partial blessing could still be given, but that was all; and here we see the beginning of the evil which ensued.

An unkind feeling was generated between the brothers. It is true that Rebekah had obtained for her son the blessing which she knew was his by promise, and which she had so feared he was about to lose.

But now she finds that evil is plotted against him. She early begins to reap the fruit of her fraudulent device. She was obliged hastily to part

with that very son, for whom she had planned and risked so much.

And Jacob, who had joined his mother in carrying out the deception, now began to feel the consequences, which followed him through a long course of events, reminding and repaying him for his deceitful and lying conduct to his father.

When absent, in the house of his uncle Laban, he sought and obtained the promise, that in return for seven years' service, he should have to wife his cousin Rachel. But when the time came that he should receive her, he was deceived, as he had deceived others, and Leah was secretly given him instead, till he should serve another seven years for the bride of his choice.

Again in after years, he too was deceived by his own sons, when they pretended that his favourite son Joseph was slain by the wild beasts.

We see by his trials and troubles in his latter years, the shadow of the sins of his early days. God thus makes the sinner's sin to find him out.

There is surely here a solemn warning to each of us, my dear mothers. First of all, there is a caution lest we incline to make favourites of one or other of our children, to the comparative disregard or neglect of others.

Now I cannot deny that some children are much more loving, more amiable, more fascinating in their disposition than others, but we should make it our earnest endeavour not to show this marked favour to some more than to others. It is bad for the favourite, for it engenders pride, selfishness, and many other evil feelings; while on the part of those neglected it tends to inculcate feelings of jealousy, revenge, and all sorts of dreadful tempers, sometimes even ending in murder. Isaac gave way to this feeling of partiality towards his eldest son, although he was evidently a worldly, self-willed young man. And in consequence of this partiality Isaac would have bestowed the blessing, and all the other advantages of the first-born, upon him, although he had sold his birthright, and notwithstanding God's own word to the contrary.

Rebekah, however, favoured the younger son, and doubtless he was more worthy of this favour; and knowing God's intention with regard to him, her plans may, at first sight, seem reasonable.

But even if the end was good, the means were bad and in no wise justified. Her motives may have been good, but at the same time she lacked faith in God to bring about His own designs; and,

as too many, even in the present day, have concluded that a good end justifies the worst means employed to promote it, she planned, practised, and encouraged her son to practise a gross deception.

Now she was wrong to deceive her husband, to take advantage of his infirmity to impose upon him. If, when she had heard of his intention to bless Esau instead of Jacob, she had gone with gentleness and seriousness, and reminded him what God had said concerning their sons, if she had recalled to his fading memory Esau's bad conduct in marrying heathen wives, it is most probable that the reasonableness of her conduct would have prevailed with the old man to confer the blessing on the rightful person. She would not then have had to have recourse to such a series of deceits and frauds.

It would have been, at the least, the proper conduct of a wife to her husband. My dear friends, we should hear less of the unhappiness of husbands and wives if they showed more reasonableness and consideration towards each other. Too often we see deceit practised on one side or the other ; plans formed, and intimacies made by the one of which the other is not aware. This causes suspicion, ill-feeling, doubt, and a host

of other sentiments which end in all sorts of misery and perhaps strife.

Do let me affectionately urge upon you, my dear mothers, if you want to keep the affections and confidence of your husbands, be perfectly open and candid with them. Tell them all your annoyances, fears or joys, let them know what frets you, and not put it down to ill-temper; and then tell them all that pleases you or interests you, so that they may enter into it too.

Depend upon it, that as love begets love, so confidence begets confidence, and you will find that you will have no cause to fear any rival.

Further, let me remind you that this deceit was a great wrong to Jacob, for by this line of conduct she made him think lightly of falsehood and cunning, by putting into his mouth and forcing him into a lie.

When the voice of conscience or of fear made him scrupulous lest he should be detected, and bring upon him a curse instead of a blessing, she even then stilled his voice, and soothed his conscientious scruples.

Do any of us act towards our children as Rebekah did? We may not train them up to lie, and to act a part which does not belong to

them, to represent themselves and their position as other than they really are. Yet I fear there are many who quiet themselves with the false idea, that the end justifies the means ; and as long as they can do well in this life, make a good show before their neighbours, and get the good opinion of those around them, they care little as to the means used to attain it. And they thus let their children see, by their example, that they neither care for truth or honesty as long as their object is gained. Oh, my dear mothers, look well to it that such is not your line of conduct ! It is a fearful thing to bring your children up in such deceit as this.

Remember, that though you may deceive man, you cannot deceive God. Man may think you far better than you are, and respect you accordingly ; but God sees you as you really are,—sinful, weak, and helpless. Strive to see yourselves as in His sight, seek pardon from Him of all the past, and a blessing for the time to come. And instead of seeking the good things of this world for your dear children, seek, first, for them and for yourselves the kingdom of God and His righteousness, trusting that all these things shall be added unto you.

IV.

HANNAH;

OR,

Encouragement to Bring Everything to God
in Prayer.

D

IV.

Hannah.

1 Samuel i. 27, 28.

TO understand fully the import of these words of gratitude, we must look back to the earlier part of the chapter, where we shall see the circumstances under which the prayer was offered.

Hannah, who is the subject of our present meditations, was one of the wives of a man named Elkanah. According to the usage of those days (upon which we need not now dwell), he had another wife, one who had borne him several sons and daughters, while poor Hannah had none. This was a source of great trouble to her, not so much from fear of losing her husband's affection, for we are expressly told that he loved Hannah, as because her more fortunate rival taunted and provoked her sorely. Let me remark here, that this conduct of Peninnah is by no means uncommon in the present day, though it may not be

from the same cause. How often do we hear the taunting unkind remark concerning others who have not some earthly good which we possess! Outwardly, these two women were both professing religion: they came up with their husband at the appointed season to sacrifice to God and to worship Him. And yet we see that while joining outwardly in the services of the temple, Peninnah was in a most uncharitable frame of mind, and doing all in her power to disturb and prevent the devotions of her rival.

My dear friends, such worship as this God will not accept; it is only mocking Him. It is, moreover, very wicked to abuse any one who is labouring under any disadvantage or affliction from the hand of God, and He will not suffer us to do it with impunity.

Now Hannah grieved so sorely at the unkindness of Peninnah that she wept sore and would not eat. Not even the entreaties of her husband, nor his affectionate remonstrances, had at first any effect upon her. It was, no doubt, very trying to be taunted with that over which she could have no control, but it was foolish of her to take it so much to heart. Instead of fretting so sorely for what she had *not*, it would have been far

wiser if she had begun to reckon and rejoice over those blessings that she had.

Had she not a good husband, one who loved her even more tenderly because of her trial?

Let us learn not to be over anxious and troubled about disappointments or annoyances which are unavoidable ; especially should we not let them so affect us as to cause us to neglect or wilfully turn from our religious duties. We may see by Hannah's after-conduct that, though she had let her grief overcome her too much, she did not harden herself and become sullen, because her husband even gently reproved her for it. She was rather led by his doing so to ask herself whether she did well thus to grieve ; and seeing how wrong she was, and knowing how troubled Elkanah was in her behalf, she wisely controlled her feelings. But what she did was even better. She betook herself to prayer : it brought her to her knees.

Is this the effect of trouble upon *us*, my friends ? Does it draw us nearer to God ? Half the weight of our cares would be gone if we cast them upon Him who careth for us. He bids all who are heavy-laden to come to Him for rest.

The very depth of her anxiety made her the more

earnest in her prayers. "Being in bitterness of soul, she prayed," and further, "she wept sore." How different is this to many of our prayers! We ask a blessing, we seek a gift; and yet with what coldness and apparent indifference we make the request. Our voice sounds as if we hardly cared whether it be granted or not. What wonder, then, that we often bitterly exclaim that we get no answer to our prayer.

But though she was so earnest and so particular as to the gift she sought, even a son, yet she was modest at the same time, and she made a solemn vow that the child should from his birth be dedicated to the Lord.

She asked for just one son, that her affliction might be taken away, and yet that one she would not withhold from the Giver, but "he should be given to the Lord all the days of his life."

It is very proper thus to give a thankoffering to God of His good gifts to us, and to devote them to His honour and service. But remember that we cannot thereby lay any claim to the gift or pretend to any merit for so doing. We shall only thus prove ourselves in a right frame of mind, and bring down upon our souls a fuller and further blessing.

We shall also do well to remark, my dear mothers, how her prayer, fervent and earnest as it was, was uttered softly and silently. None heard her speak ; "her voice was not heard," (verse 13) only her lips moved. We must not judge of prayer by its loudness, by its outward effect upon the attention of bystanders, offered like the Pharisee's, "to be seen of men." As is so beautifully described in the well-known hymn ;

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed ;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

"Prayer is the heaving of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near."

And so, my dear friends, we can never excuse ourselves by saying we have not the opportunity for prayer. At all times, at all seasons, in the crowded workroom, in the ever-bustling throng of the street, the words of petition may ascend unseen, and perhaps unsuspected, from our hearts, to our Father's ever-listening ear, and He will send His swift-winged messengers to guide or save us.

Now I would not have you think that I wish to make little of, or to discourage any one from joining in, the outward form of worship, or in

responding audibly in the public services of God's house; this we should never omit to do, or it is to be feared our silent assent to all the responses may lead us into wandering thoughts and listlessness and worldly inattention.

But in private prayer and special petition, such as that of Hannah, the case is different. There need be no outward expression then.

Even then it is possible you may be misunderstood and falsely condemned as she was by Eli the priest, for we find that he accused her of being drunk because she prayed so earnestly and wrestled with God in silence and weeping.

Let us not forget that this was the same accusation brought against the apostles in later years, and Christ Himself foresaw that this would be the case, for He says in Matthew v. 11, 12; "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."

You see He bids us not to be deterred from the right path by opposition, but to rejoice in view of the recompense of the reward.

Strive, then, my dear friends, to be less hasty

in judging others. And if we be falsely accused, like Hannah, and our acts or our motives misjudged, let us follow her example; while we boldly deny it or assert our innocence, let us do so in the spirit of humility and gentleness. It is very hard to bear undeserved reproach and reproof; but let us remember that our dear Saviour bore it all when He was here upon earth without threat or angry retort, and if we would be His disciples we must expect the same, and follow in His steps.

And we know not if we may not by our meekness and humility towards our reprovers, perhaps bring them to do us justice afterwards, and gain them as our friends.

It was so with Eli, for when he saw the real cause of her conduct he gave her his blessing, and adding his prayers to hers, made the petition doubly effectual.

And so in due time the child she had so longed for, that she had so earnestly prayed for, was born; and she did well to name him Samuel,—asked of God. Each time his name was mentioned it would remind her of God's goodness to her, and how this child was to be given up to God all the days of his life. At last the time came

when he would be able to leave his mother, and she did not fail to fulfil her vow. She brought him, hard as it must have been to part with him, and presented him to Eli. She reminded the old priest, not of his former unkind reproof of her, but of the prayer she had offered, and bore joyful testimony to God's answer to her request: he was asked of the Lord, "and now behold I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth." We must not understand that because she used the word *lent* that she meant to take him back as we understand that word now, for she adds "as long as he liveth." But all we give to God may be said to be lent to Him, although first given and received from Him, and therefore His by right. But He will most surely repay us for our gifts to Him, for He says, "Give and it shall be given unto you."

And now, my dear friends, I want to bring into a few earnest words the chief points that this history should teach us. I need not dwell upon the after-life of the holy Samuel. You all know how highly favoured he was all his days, and even while he was a young child, how God appeared and revealed to him His own wise purposes and plans.

We hear no more of his mother after the utterance of the beautiful and heart-stirring prayer and thanksgiving at the commencement of the next chapter, and the statement that after her return home God repaid her for her loan to Him by sending her three sons and two daughters.

The whole account describes her as one strong in prayer.

This is the whole key to the after-life of the infant Samuel. If there were more mothers like Hannah, there would be more sons like Samuel. He was truly the child of prayer, and was taught with his earliest breath to lisp his infant desires at the throne of grace.

Dear mothers, do you pray thus over your children? do you devote them from day to day, even all the days of their life, to God's service? Do you outwardly bring them and devote them to Him in baptism, and strive to train them as soon as they can understand what their duty is towards the God whom you worship? If they see you prayerless and godless, what wonder that they turn aside from the right path and follow their own devices!

And though it is doubtless true that many a child of godly parents turns away from the narrow

path, I believe that the instances are rare when they are not, at some time or other, brought back and converted from the evil of their ways, in answer to the faithful and unceasing prayers of their mothers.

If you find you cannot govern them, if they have even now got beyond your control, it is not too late to begin now. Begin and *pray* for them ; take them in your prayers to the throne of grace, and ask God to do for them and with them what you are unable to do yourselves.

Be not weary in prayer,—persevere,—“pray without ceasing,” and the answer shall come at last.

And you, O mothers, who have young children at home, begin early with them. It is never *too early* to train them to God’s service, both by your words and your example, and they will grow up to be praying men and women by and bye. Take all your wants to God ; think nothing too great or impossible for Him to grant ; and deem nothing so small or unimportant as to be beneath His notice. “Cast *all* your care upon Him, for He careth for you.”

And having cast it on Him, be of good cheer. Leave your request there in His hands, rise up, and be no more cast down, and all shall be well.

v.

ABIGAIL;

OR,

What a Prudent Wife can Achieve.

V.

Abigail.

1 Samuel xxv. 4—38.

THIS woman of whom we read in 1 Sam. xxv., and whose wondrous prudence and courtesy we cannot help noticing, was the wife of a very bad man, called Nabal. The description given of him in the second and third verses of this chapter is very strong. "The man was very great," "but the man was churlish, and evil in his doings." Outwardly, in the eyes of the world, he was very great, he was like the rich man in the parable of our Lord, he had great possessions, but in his character he was churlish, ill-tongued, selfish, and mean.

And this is the sort of man we find married to the beautiful and wise Abigail. We cannot help thinking that the union with such a man must have been much against her will, and perhaps forced upon her. We know how often this is the case, for the sake of position and wealth on the

one hand, and, on the other, for the sake of winning a fair face, or under the impulse of some sudden fancy.

Nabal's character, too, may not have shown itself in its true colours till the discovery was too late, and poor Abigail found herself linked for life to one for whom she could feel neither respect nor affection.

Perhaps there are some amongst us now who, when it has been too late for remedy, have found themselves in very much the same position. The greatest trial of their days is the husband of their choice, who ought rather to be the joy of their life, and the pride of their existence.

Well, my dear mothers, if there be any among you like this, attend to me for a short while, as I try to show you how to make the best of your trial in following the example of Abigail under the circumstances.

We find that King David, while fleeing from the face of Saul, was at one time reduced to such straits, that he was obliged to beg for food from this same Nabal. He sent messengers to the rich man, and reminded him of various occasions when he, and his soldiers, had been of good service to Nabal's shepherds, and with great modesty

asked for a share of the good things with which he abounded. But the wicked Nabal fell into a passion, and not only refused him any food at all, but spoke all manner of evil against David to his servants.

The report which was brought to David of the manner in which Nabal had received his message caused him great displeasure, and he hastily resolved that as all his kindness was so little appreciated, he would soon make Nabal feel the power of his wrath, and he would destroy all that belonged to him.

He was on his way to execute this vengeance when the news of his coming reached the house of Nabal; and one of the servants who had experienced the kindness of David before, came to Abigail and told her all that had passed, and how his master had provoked them by bad words and unkindness, adding his testimony to the character of Nabal, "He is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him."

Now, we see the character of a wise and prudent wife brought forward in striking contrast to that of her mean and grasping husband. It is often in a great emergency that a good woman is seen to best advantage. Strive to be like

Abigail in cases of sudden and unexpected difficulty or danger. Do not yield to despair and think it is no good to do anything. Be calm, be collected, plan what is best to be done, and having planned it, set about it yourself at once. She did not waste a long time in bewailing her husband's conduct, or in upbraiding him for being the cause of their danger. Neither did she seek safety for herself alone, and leave her husband to the fate he so well deserved.

This would have been cowardly and unlike a wife. No; only one course lay open to her, and that was to take the food for which David had petitioned, and that of the best. But not only this, she must herself supplicate his mercy and excuse her husband. And when she came to him, notice how she behaved. Though she was the wife of this great man, so wealthy and so powerful, and though David was at the time only a fugitive and an outcast, she cast herself at his feet, calling him "my lord," and styling herself "thine handmaid." And what does she say? She takes all the blame upon herself: "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be." Here shines forth her conjugal affection; she is willing to draw upon herself the punishment of her

husband's conduct, and is most generously willing to bear anything herself so that he and all those at home may be spared.

How many, I fear, would have let him pay the penalty himself, rather casting it at him that he had no one but himself to blame, that he had brought it on himself, and that he richly deserved it.

Then, further, she tries to make the best of his fault, as a good wife should always do ; she excuses it as his folly more than his malice : "Nabal is his name, and folly is with him."

Seeing now that David was a little mollified, she ventures to offer him the presents she had brought with her, speaking of them as of little worth, and only as a sort of compensation to the servants for the ill-treatment they had received at her husband's hands. She concludes by reminding him of all his acts of goodness and bravery, and assures him that, though he is now in trouble, God will surely bring him safely through it ; pleading that, when he shall have been raised to the throne in peace and prosperity, if he refrains from the execution of his present bloody resolve, he will not have the pain of recalling the indulgence of cruelty and revenge.

A petition so nobly and yet so humbly presented from the lips of one so fair, and withal so modest, could not fail to win the favour of so good and generous a man as David. He not only yields to her persuasion and relents, but thanks and blesses her for having saved him from avenging himself by shedding blood.

Thus the prudence and bravery of this good wife saved her husband and her household from perishing.

But though Nabal escaped from the hands of him whom he had made his enemy by his own bad temper and ungenerous spirit, yet we see by the concluding few verses that God would not let his iniquity pass unpunished. When Abigail returned from her interview with David, she found her husband feasting and drinking at home, caring little for the danger which had threatened him, and not having noticed or cared about his wife's absence. He had refused to spare any food to assist those who were in want, yet he could waste it in feasting and rioting to gratify himself. He was so overcome with drink that Abigail dared not tell him of the errand which had taken her away, or the success she had met with.

She neither reproached him, nor boasted of her own line of conduct. In such a condition as he then was, it was better to leave him to recover. "Wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, till the morning light."

Here is a word for those who not unfrequently have husbands in a similar condition. It is no good to rouse anger then by argument or reproach. At such times silence is the only course to pursue, for the man is open to no reason. It takes very little, when men have thus reduced themselves below the level of the brute creation, to rouse their passions by angry altercations, too often ending in scenes which are a disgrace to any Christian land. I have no doubt it is very hard to control the tongue and not to give way to anger or reproach, but I beg of you, my dear friends, to strive for the victory over your own tongues, and I am sure you will not have cause to regret it.

Pray for your husband: this is all you can do while he is in this state; but when he has recovered, then is the time for calm reasoning and expostulation.

The next morning we read that when Nabal had come to himself, Abigail told him of his

narrow escape, and what difficulty she had had in appeasing the anger of David, and pointed out to him the folly of his conduct.

My dear mothers, this quiet, sensible way of talking between husbands and wives should never rouse anger. We ought to be able affectionately both to give and to take rebuke for our faults, but let us take heed that it is done *lovingly*, not for the sake of finding fault; and, further, let it always be just between ourselves alone, and not in the presence of another.

We should be very careful of the manner and tone of our fault-finding, but it is no less important to choose well both the *time* and the *place* for the duty. And let us also be willing and humble to take rebuke, as well as to give it. I am sure many distressing family quarrels would be avoided if more affection and more prudence were shown in these little private scenes of married life.

How sad, and yet how just, is the judgment which so soon fell upon Nabal! "And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." Ten days were given him, but he showed no sign of repentance, and so he was smitten of the Lord, and died!

How glad must Abigail have felt that she had

used her influence in his behalf, and that she had acted in every way as she did ! She had nothing to reproach herself with, when her husband was taken from her. She can scarcely be expected to have felt much regret at his loss, but she would have had the bitter pangs of remorse of conscience to suffer, if she had in any way failed in her duty to him. My dear friends, remember, if you have bad husbands, that however bad, they are still your husbands ; and, as such, you owe them a duty, from which their wickedness cannot release you in God's sight.

Their conduct may call forth all your tact, all your self-control, and require all your prudence as good wives. But do your best in the line of duty, and you may have the joy at last of winning them into the right path. And if you should not have this blessing, you will, at least, have no feelings of remorse, no pangs of self-reproach, when they are taken from you.

Finally, I would ask you, Do you feel that their conduct is such that they are bringing upon themselves the wrath of an offended God, and that destruction is hanging over them ? Oh ! then it becomes you well to do as Abigail did with David, arise, make haste and plead in their behalf.

Cast yourselves at the feet of the avenger of blood, with affectionate, earnest pleading; utter your petitions in the ear of Him who willet not the death of a sinner, and may be He will grant you your petitions.

This is, at least, your duty. Pray for your husbands. Not only live so prudently and so piously that they may be won by your conduct, but pray for them—take them to the throne of grace and plead for them.

But before you can do this effectually, do not forget to find access to that same Throne for yourselves, for surely you must be accepted and pardoned by Him who is willing and waiting to receive you, before you can hope to prevail in prayer for those you love, or effect any work of reformation in them by your own life's influence.

May the Lord God, of His goodness, enable you and strengthen you in this great and glorious home-duty.

VI.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH;

OR,

The Reward of Trusting Obedience.

VI.

The Widow of Barephath.

1 Kings xvii. 14.

TO-NIGHT we have before us a scene in the life of a widow woman and her son. The famine was sore in the whole land. God had sent no rain for many long months, and all the people of Israel and the neighbouring countries were in a sore strait for both food and water. The wicked king Ahab with his heathen wife Jezebel were ruling the land, and all the people were living in such a state of dreadful wickedness and idolatry that at length God's anger was kindled; and He sent them the awful visitation of this famine as a punishment.

In this favoured land, and in these happy times, we have little idea, my dear friends, of all that is included in that terrible word famine. We may know what it is to be hungry, it is true, and to be so poor that we have not the money to buy

the food we so much want both for ourselves and our children. But think what it must be when all the wealth of the land could avail nothing: no money could purchase food, for there was none to buy. Each one made their store go as far as they could, knowing well that when it was exhausted no price would buy more. Yet daily it grew less and less, till starvation stared them in the face.

Still we find that in His wrath God remembered mercy. He took care of His own prophet, and kept him safe from hunger and want by the brook Cherith, where he had water to drink, while others were parched with thirst; and he also had bread and meat provided daily for his nourishment, even the hungry ravens being made by God to wait upon him twice a day.

I do not intend to dwell longer on this subject to-night; but rather to consider how still farther the Lord took care of His faithful servant, even when "after a while the brook dried up." God told Elijah to go to Zarephath, a heathen city; and that there he should find support and shelter with a widow woman, when the Jews, his own people, were afraid to harbour him, because the king sought to slay him.

We are first introduced to this poor woman as she stood near the gate of the city, gathering sticks to cook her last meal for herself and her child. Hope had vanished from her soul; want, fearful want, had not only told its sad tale in her pinched features and wasted form, but she had the bitter sorrow of seeing her darling and only son perishing, sinking before her very eyes, and she without power to save him.

It is bad enough for us mothers to see our children ill and dying of some trying disease and suffering intense pain; but that very suffering renders the loss less hard to bear, for we can but rejoice that our darling is relieved from pain, and is at rest. But, oh! what must it be to see one's child sound in mind and limb, the only pain that of racking hunger, the gnawing of a dreadful void within which we can do nought to assuage!

I think I can fancy how this poor woman had eked out her small portion of meal each day, using as little as she possibly could, only just enough to stop the cravings of hunger. And now at last there is only sufficient for one meal more: the time has come when the barrel will have to be emptied, without any reasonable prospect of its being replenished. With such thoughts as

these, and feeling that there is no help for it, the lonely pair sally forth to gather a few sticks for fuel. In such a condition as this she was surely more fit to receive alms than to give entertainment to any one. But God often makes use of the most unlikely means to fulfil His own ends, and orders all events to carry out His own wise purposes. To her, then, poor as she was, the prophet was sent to receive food and shelter throughout the remaining years of famine.

And his very coming, instead of being a burden or cause of trouble to her, proved the very best thing that could have befallen her, and the means of keeping her own table supplied while others were in want.

While she was thus gathering her sticks, the stranger accosted her, asking her to fetch him a draught of water, and she readily went. She made no objection on account of its scarcity, nor asked what he would give her for it, as it had naturally to be paid for in such times as that. She made no excuse nor uncivil reply, which I am sorry to say that people in bodily weakness or anxiety of mind are too often apt to do. This shows us that she was of an obliging and generous temper. We should be ready to do any

office of kindness to strangers, and if we have not the means to give of our substance, we can often aid and oblige them by gentle words and little acts of kindness.

A cup of cold water, though it may cost nothing but the act of offering, has the assurance that it shall in no wise lose its reward.

Then when the prophet bade her bake a cake for him first, for that God had promised that the barrel of meal should not fail throughout the years of famine, how readily she believed him and the glad tidings he brought! Whether she worshipped God or not we are not told, but she had certainly heard of Him, and regarded Him as the God of the people of Israel, for she mentions Him in her reply to Elijah as the *Lord thy God*.

Do you not think, then, my dear friends, that it was a great trial of her faith to have to use this small remaining portion of meal and oil for one whom she had never seen before, instead of giving it to her only and much-loved son, who needed it so sorely? But she gets over all objections and obeys the request, relying upon the promise that her wants should be supplied. We may well exclaim, as was said to one of her

nation in far later days, "O woman, great is thy faith."

We may well learn, dear mothers, a lesson of complete trust in a God who has promised to supply all our need. He does not promise, remember, to supply all our *wishes*, to keep us in luxury or sumptuous living, but simply all our *need*. That is all He did in the case before us,—it was an existence of the simplest fare, but it was enough, and it never failed. It was shared also by the prophet himself. Elijah did not complain of the commonness of the food, nor of its being always the same. And yet how often we find persons in the present time complaining of their fare, instead of being thankful to the great and good God who has given them so much. And if Elijah took this food thankfully and without murmuring, well might the widow and her son do so. She had been expecting shortly to die; there seemed no help for it, and yet now they had always enough. Truly her heart must have been overflowing with thankfulness!

Do you notice too, that in this very miracle, though God knew that she did believe the word of His prophet, still He kept her faith ever on trial. We are not told that either the barrel or

the cruse was ever *full*, but only that it never wasted, that is, it never failed. Daily she had to trust Him for the next day's supply. It is the same lesson which He would teach us in the Lord's prayer, when He bids us pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

The meal and oil kept multiplying as it was daily used, the supply kept always the same, it was renewed as it was needed. But mark, it was just in its using and not in hoarding that it was blessed.

"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

There is nothing lost by laying out in God's treasure-house; what is laid out for Him or His servants is laid out to best interest, and is sure of a recompense. There are some of us, dear friends, I fear, who are ready enough to make excuse why we should not be expected to help forward God's cause, nor to work in His vineyard. We say we are too poor or too ignorant, but we do not try to make use of the little we have; in using which for Him, we should be blessed tenfold.

And let us learn to take God at His word. He

has given *us* many and precious promises: let us not only believe them by the assent of our minds or our lips, but let us show we believe them by acting accordingly.

The widow before us did not stop to see the meal increased before she would risk using it for the prophet. She might naturally have argued that it had never increased before, and how dared she expect it to do so now? She did not wait to see signs and wonders before she would believe, but she heard God's promise by the mouth of His prophet, and she arose and did according to the saying of Elijah. This was an active faith, a trusting obedience.

And now, dear mothers, will you take God at His word, will you accept His offer of salvation to-night? You know yourselves to be spiritually poor and needy, you have no righteousness of your own; but you have sins both of commission and of omission, which lie as a burden upon your soul. Hearken, then. Jesus has died for just such as you, and you have only to look to Him for pardon and peace. Only "believe, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house."

Let not cares and anxieties keep you from Him. This woman did not answer, "Let me make for

myself and child first, and then if I have enough I will make for thee," but she waited on God's servant first. "Seek *ye* first the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you." Honour God, attend His house, observe His day, keep His commandments, and teach your children to do the same, and He will never forsake you, and will supply all your temporal needs.

What a valuable lesson this mother's faith must have been to her son! He could not help seeing the blessedness that came through faith, even "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Do *your* children learn this lesson from you, dear mothers? Do they see and hear you fretting, complaining, and doubting? If so, they will do the same. But do they see you happy, trusting, cheerful Christians, in adversity as well as in prosperity? Such, then, also will be the blessed character of their experience.

VII.

JEZEBEL;

OR,

The Recompense of the Wicked.

VII.

Jezebel.

1 Kings xxi. 25.

WE have been considering the characters of several of the "Mothers of the Bible," in most of whom we have found some points, at least, to admire and imitate. But here we have one who does not seem to have had one redeeming quality. She was a thoroughly bad woman, consistently bad ; a bad wife and a bad mother. I do not say, remember, that she was an *unfaithful* wife, or a cruel mother to her children. But she was of such a character in these two relations, that we read of her husband Ahab, that "there was none like him for wickedness, which did set himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, *whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.*" She was at the root and spring of all his wickedness, she prompted and suggested deeds of darkness

and cruelty, she planned and carried out plots of shame and bloodshed.

And then, when Ahab was slain, and his wicked son Ahaziah ascended the throne, it is related of him that he too did evil in the sight of the Lord, and "walked in the way of his father, and in *the way of his mother*."

You see, dear friends, how a bad mother made a bad son, and no wonder that it is added that "he provoked the anger of the Lord," so that He only allowed him to reign two years over the land. He took no warning from the events of his father's life, or of his miserable death, but continued in his steps, and allowed himself, doubtless, to be "stirred up" by his wicked mother, as his father had been. And so his career was soon cut short by the hand of death. Sad it is for those children who by birth inherit characters of vice.

We are all born with the nature of sin in us, it is true; but it behoves us mothers to take this thought deeply to heart, that we may not cause our children to inherit from us natures of special depravity and guilt. Unhappy, yea, most wretched, are those parents who help by their own lives of wickedness to bequeath to their offspring from

the moment of birth such qualities as must end in the utter perdition of those children's souls!

Now, having read such awful words concerning this woman's character as a wife and a mother, so that words almost fail in condemning her abuse of the sacred duties belonging to these high estates, we shall do well, dear friends, to cast a rapid glance over the main points of her history.

The first thing that we are told concerning her is, that she was not satisfied with inducing Ahab to serve Baal, and to build altars and groves for that false god, so that idolatry in all its fearful forms was countenanced and even encouraged throughout the land where God alone had formerly been worshipped. She was not content with this, I say, but felt that the existence of good and faithful men, such as were the prophets of the Lord, was a living rebuke to these evil practices, which could not be carried on with impunity whilst these good men were allowed to live and bear witness for the truth.

She, therefore, made use of the high position she held, and either influenced her husband, or obtained his permission to order their wholesale slaughter. It is, at all events, related as her doing, whether directly or indirectly. (1 Kings

xviii. 4.) Such is always the persecuting character of utterly godless people. They would fain exterminate all those who would witness against the vices which they encourage, and they cannot rest while there remain any to testify against them.

Having endeavoured thus to destroy the worshippers of the true God, although one of the chief men in her court had secretly frustrated her designs by saving a hundred of these prophets from her vengeance, we next find her wrath descending upon that brave and noble witness for the truth the prophet Elijah. Proudly she sends him word of her base plan, and calls upon her false gods to assist her thus to avenge the blood of the prophets of Baal slain on Mount Carmel.

But God could protect and save His servant who trusted in Him, so that her proud boasts were of no avail.

In a new character she now comes upon the scene. It is the climax of her wicked plots, the deep vice of which makes our blood curdle. Her covetous husband, notwithstanding all his other possessions, and not content with them, set his heart upon a piece of land which belonged to

another. He proposed to Naboth, the owner of it, to purchase it fairly; but he would not consent to part with it. From conscientious motives, and in accordance with the laws of God concerning an inheritance, Naboth was obliged to refuse the King's request. In bitterness of spirit and disappointment at not obtaining his desire, this foolish and wicked King tormented himself till, like a petted child, he sulked and would eat no bread. And here Jezebel comes forward to obtain for him his desire by foul means, if she could not do so by fair ones. We need not enter into the details of the plot. Suffice it to say, that by her instructions men were found to bear false witness against the innocent man, and his death, and that of his sons, was the speedy result, followed by the forfeiture of all his property to the crown. Ahab thus obtained the vineyard without inquiry as to the means that had been used to get it.

But the Lord of heaven and earth had been witness of it all, and He soon sent His prophet Elijah to the perpetrators of the deed to pass sentence upon them. That very property which had caused such a deed of blood should be the spot where the blood of the murderer should be

spilled upon the ground. And, although God postponed the punishment, yet it came at last. For when Ahab's son Joram was slain by Jehu, his dead body was cast into the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. The fate of Jezebel was rather longer delayed, but was none the less sure. She lived to witness the death of her two wicked sons one after the other; and, at last, when Jehu was, at God's command, destroying the wicked house of Ahab, she was, at his bidding, thrown down from the window, and the dogs ate her body, so that none could say, "This is Jezebel." No rites of sepulture, no funeral pomp, no handsome monument to receive the remains of this notorious and "cursed woman!"

And now, O ye wives and mothers, let us look with awe on all that remains of this once powerful woman,—the scull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. They were the instruments which had done all the deeds of horror and blood: the feet to walk in the evil way, the hands to pen instructions of deep conspiracy, and the head to plan and command it all.

And while uttering our exclamations of wonder at the enormity of her vileness, let us examine whether we are wholly free from blame in these

matters ourselves. You start! You shrink with horror at the idea of my attributing such deeds to any here present to-day. But I say that there are many persons who show by their deeds in the humble position they hold, that it is not the want of will or of wickedness that prevents them from being like Jezebel; but that for which they can claim no merit, merely the lack of opportunity.

She was the eager persecutor of God's prophets, because she had the power to lay her hand on their lives. But there are still many who by their evil tongues speak against God's servants with such virulence, and act so unkindly towards them, merely because this is the extent of their power. And they show by this what far worse things they would do if they were in the position to do it.

And now let me press upon you another important point by asking you, what is the character of your relationship and of your influence in your own homes, over your husbands, and over your children? I have said to you before what a solemn responsibility is yours. Do you use it aright? Do you stir up thoughts and aims that are good in *his* heart, whose destiny is so closely linked with yours? When you see the flicker of

good impressions in his mind do you help to fan it into a flame, and then endeavour by all the means in your power to feed and encourage good desires? Or is it the reverse with you? You know not where your influence may end. That thoughtless word, that careless laugh, that unkind remark may just turn the tide; and from being a pious, honest, and respectable member of society, he may become lost to you and to himself throughout eternity! And on you will be the blame,—the curse!

And now as to your children. To whom sooner than the mother do they come, from their very earliest years, with their tale of woe or trouble, of fear or joy? Do they find a response with you? Do you encourage and foster the right and the noble in them? Do you train them with ideas of truthfulness and honesty, discouraging all that is mean and vitiating?

Remember that such as you make them now by your influence for good or for evil, such they will be in a far greater degree when they grow up, and bring the teaching of their early years into practice.

And your own life, your everyday actions, what are they? Are they such as you will never

feel ashamed that they should quote and copy? Should you be taken from them early, what remembrance will they carry through life of you? Will it be such as will be a credit to you, and have a good influence upon them throughout their lives.

There was once a good man who had the misfortune to lose his mother when he was still quite a child. But he used to say even when he was quite old, that there was only one thing he could remember of her, and that was how she used to take him to her side, and open the large family Bible and tell him the sweet stories it contained. And he would add that the sight never vanished from his mind how they used always to end this study by kneeling together with folded hands, and he could still fancy he heard her soft, low voice as she offered up those simple words of prayer, which even he could understand and follow. The remembrance of those holy seasons had preserved him in youth and through manhood from many temptations, and bore him up with the hope and high aim of joining her in heaven.

Dear mothers, will your children bear such a testimony of you? will they rise up and call you

blessed? Will piety and a deep seated religion be an heirloom to descend to your children and grandchildren, as was said of the unfeigned faith of Timothy, "which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice"? How far brighter a testimony would this be, than that borne of the infamous Jezebel. Which shall it be of you, my dear friends? Give yourselves first to Jesus. Accept Him as your Saviour, and invite Him to dwell in your homes, to sanctify and to bless them; and then He will help you in your high calling to live bright examples, and to spread a holy influence amongst the loved ones of your families. May you all strive to do this, my dear mothers, and thus avoid the awful example of her whom we have been contemplating this evening.

VIII.

THE SHUNAMMITE;

OR,

It is well with the Righteous under all
Circumstances.

VIII.

The Shunammite.

2 Kings iv. 26.

IS it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?

This is a most important question, Is it well with thee? Let us first consider what it is to be well.

There are two senses in which the question may be asked: in a temporal sense, and also in a spiritual one.

I have no doubt that many here, being asked the question, might feel inclined to reply that it is not at all well with them. Their circumstances are far other than they could wish, work and strive as they will, it seems no good; while others they know of seem to have enough and to spare, they are almost perishing with want. Or others may say that it is not of their circumstances they would so much complain. *That* would be good enough,

if only they had the blessing of good health. Constant ailments seem to be their lot! or, old age is creeping upon them, and they have the daily increasing infirmities of advancing years preventing them enjoying life as they should wish.

Or, again, some may think it is well enough with themselves, if it were only the same with their husbands. They began life so happily together, but somehow a sad change has come over them! He is no longer what he used to be; nay, more, with some, I fear, he has become the terror of the whole family. Bad company, and the fearful demon of drink, have become his ever-present associates, and his nightly return home is a source of anxiety and dread to both his wife and children.

And, lastly, I know there are some who can answer gladly that both they and their husbands are well enough in this world, at least; business prospers, the goodwill and, it may be, the respect of their neighbours follow them; but yet there is one dark shadow that crosses their otherwise cloudless sky; it is the child of their love, perhaps more than one, over whom they have bitter reason to wail and lament.

One loved one, it may be long years ago, was

called in happy infancy, or growing childhood, to an early grave. Your eyes moisten as you call to mind the keenness of that first grief that entered your happy dwelling; and as you followed that marble form to its last resting-place, and then returned to the joyless hearth, and sadly laid aside all that could remind you of your darling, you felt as if all hope was banished from your heart, that there was nothing on earth to care for now.

But, hark! as years pass on and other infant feet patter on that homely floor, and the prattle of other voices helps to soothe the aching of your loving heart, once more the star of hope arises, and you and your husband plan together bright prospects for your little ones. And now a sigh escapes you as I remind you of all this, and turn to you once more, and say, "Is it well with the child?" Alas, no! All that you have done for him, and borne for him, could not keep him at your side. He would not stay and brighten your declining years by his loving presence, and his tender care. He would persist in following the lead of some worthless companions, and your heart beats with fearful misgiving concerning him.

Or it may be you had a daughter, whose happiness was your one thought night and day.

You never kept her strictly, or refused her anything you could possibly provide for her; and you looked for loving gratitude and affection in return! But, alas! how differently has it turned out! You shudder as you think how low she has fallen; you know not where she is, and yet with a mother's undying love you long even yet to see her repentant form cross your threshold, and to clasp her to your heart.

Oh! yes, there are comparatively few, perhaps, who can answer to all three of these questions as did the noble Shunammite before us, "*It is well.*"

And I will tell you why it is that you cannot do so. Because you cannot feel it to be well in spiritual things.

These must be well *first*, and then all things shall be well with thee. And as we look at the circumstances before us, we may be inclined to wonder that *she* could say it. She had one only child, a fair young son, upon whom doubtless both her own and her husband's affections were fondly centred. Yet one sad day, in the midst of apparent health and strength, he was suddenly seized with a fatal malady, and soon his lovely form lay still in death.

As long as hope remained, and her loving care was needed, she used every means in her power to relieve and save her darling.

But see her now, when all is over: in calm determination and silent grief she carries him to the chamber that Elisha the man of God had been wont to occupy, and laying the little body on *his* bed, she locks him safely in. And then with all speed she hastens to him whose sojourn in her house had been so blessed to her and her husband, and who she felt sure could, even now, by his availing prayer to the Almighty, bring once more joy to her soul.

It was, then, *he* who put the stirring and heart-searching questions to her, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?"

And it was in full confidence in the power of God, and the prevailing intercession of His prophet, that she could say, even in the face of trial, of affliction, of *death*, "It is well."

And so, my dear friends, shall we too be enabled to say and to feel the same from our inmost souls, if we have that same confidence in the power and love of our heavenly Father, and in the prevailing intercession of His only Son, our Advocate and Mediator.

"Is it well," then, with thy soul? Hast thou received from Him the pardon of all thy sins? Hast thou offered thy house as His abode, thy heart as His dwelling-place? When others closed their doors on Him and yielded no help to His distressed or careworn servants, hast thou bid them welcome in His name, and gladly offered of thy substance for their relief, even though it be but as a glass of cold water? In short, hast thou given thyself to Him, a repentant, pardoned, ransomed soul, to be wholly His, and at His service?

If so, happy art thou, O mother! and if not, alas! it is *not* well with thee, till thou canst yield thyself thus.

It is not till we have reached this state of self-abandonment to God that we can cast all our care upon Him and feel and know that whatever befalls us or those dear to us, "It is well."

But we must not expect, my dear friends, nor are we led in God's Word to believe, that because we are His adopted children, we shall not meet with trouble and trial,—nay, we may be tried more than others, though not more than we are able to bear. And in all we shall have the ever-abiding comfort and support of a loving Friend,

who does not willingly afflict us, but has some good purpose in His mysterious dealings with us.

And now, O ye care-worn mothers, let me urge you if you have found such a friend as I describe, in Jesus, cast all your care upon Him, and do not dishonour Him by doubts and fears. Earthly trials are but for a time. You are poor and in want, it may be, now, but the time is soon coming when you shall be rich indeed. Many who have now their good things shall envy you in that day when you shall be arrayed in robes of righteousness, and shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb, from which they perhaps are shut out.

Lastly, ye mothers, who weep over absent prodigals, remember that He who has now brought *you* to His feet, can bring *them* there too. He watches over them in the far-off land of their wanderings, and is yearning over them to bring them back. That voice which could pierce the vast space between this world and the land of departed spirits, and summon the soul back to its vacated abode, is it too hard to believe that it could also reach that wandering one, however fallen, or however hopeless the case may seem?

Pray for them that they may rejoice your latter days, by returning home, and find pardon and peace at the feet of that Saviour who has died for sinners, even the worst, and therefore for them.

Thus shall you yet rejoice in the prodigal's return, and your hearts may even now, by faith, exclaim, "It is well."

IX.

HERODIAS;

OR,

The great danger of Worldly Amusements.

IX.

Herodias.

Matthew xiv. 3—11.

THE little that is recorded of this woman shows us that she was very wicked in every sense of the word. She had forsaken her own husband Philip, and was living with his half-brother Herod. Enraged beyond measure at the reproofs of that holy man John the Baptist, she determined to compass his ruin. But she could not achieve this for some time. At first she only induced her wicked partner to imprison the prophet. He would gladly have done more, but, though he laid hold on John and put him in prison to gratify Herodias, yet he dared do no more "for fear of the multitude," because they counted John as a prophet.

We may notice here what a life of constant dread must be that of a godless tyrant. It is

true he did not fear God, or he would not have imprisoned John at all. But he feared the *people*. He was afraid for his own safety. He knew his vices had already made him odious to them, and that a slight provocation only was needed to make them break out against him. So we often find persons restrain themselves for fear of consequences by which they may suffer, rather than from fear of sinning against God. A concern for their own credit, or personal safety, will often preserve men from committing scandalous sins. And it was the same fear of them that sat at meat with him that made Herod, later, consent to the murder rather than appear to break his oath.

Now, though John was in prison, and therefore certain not to be able to rebuke the king any more, still that wicked woman Herodias was not satisfied with this measure of revenge.

A woman will do many things to get her own way. She will wait and wait, contrive and plan, till at last she brings about her own ends. It is well indeed when this intense and firm determination to conquer circumstances, and bend them to her will, is accompanied by goodness, purity, and love.

Unhappily, however, she is not always patient or persevering in a right cause. She is capable of an implacable hatred, which will carry her through all obstacles to the attainment of that which she purposes. Such an instance is before us.

John being in prison was not enough. He had dared to rebuke her unfaithfulness to her husband, and her present evil life. Her implacable revenge thirsted for his blood, and would not rest till it was shed.

It is possible that Herod was himself a sharer in the plot, and that his oath, and subsequently his surprise at her request, were only devices to hide appearances and pacify the people. But whether he was a party to it or not, he was equally guilty in the crime.

Herod's birthday came. It was kept, as was usual, with great pomp and feasting; doubtless drunkenness and riot were abounding.

To please such a licentious king as Herod all was done that could gratify the eye and grace the solemnity. In honour of the day the daughter of Herodias came and danced before them. Such an exhibition cannot be too strongly condemned. At such a scene, during such a time of debauchery, no modest girl would have been

willing to be present, much less to have exposed herself to the gaze of such an audience.

But Herod, as both the mother and daughter probably knew, was just the man to be pleased at such a performance.

Times of mirth and feasting are often the convenient opportunities for carrying on bad designs, and this was just what this wicked woman wanted. She had, doubtless, inspired her daughter with a kindred feeling of hatred to the prophet, and they had planned the request she was to make.

The dance brought about just what they had anticipated, and, his heart being merry, the king entered into an extravagant obligation to give her whatever she would ask, confirming it by an oath. Now the time had arrived to which Herodias had looked forward, and for which she had waited so long!

But listen to the fearful request from the lips of one so young and so fair! "Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger!" And the deed must be done at once: no time for relenting when soberness should return. No space for trial or forms of justice which might, and surely would, terminate in his acquittal and freedom. No, it

must be done on the spot ; and, to be sure of its performance, the head must be brought in on a charger. It is stated that the king was sorry, but we cannot tell whether from a feeling of his old reverence for John before he had sunk so low in sin, or whether he only pretended to be so. At any rate, "for the oath's sake he commanded it to be given her."

He made a specious show of honour, but it is a great mistake to suppose that a wicked oath will justify a still more wicked action.

It was not, however, so much for the sake of the oath, but for those that sat with him that he granted the demand. It is probable that, if she had demanded a vast sum of money, or extensive possessions, he would have found some way out of the difficulty. But John the Baptist's head was of far less value to *him* than wealth or property, so he immediately issues a warrant for beheading John : "He commanded it to be given her." Thus was that voice silenced, that "burning and shining light" extinguished, only to shine brighter, and for ever, before the throne of God. He was now released from his long imprisonment, and was sent to his rest, and his great reward. "And his head was brought, and given to the

damsel, and she brought it to her mother." So closes this awful tragedy.

That wicked woman had got her own way, and accomplished that upon which she had set her heart! We hear nothing of her end, but we feel sure that great bitterness of spirit must have followed her as long as she lived. That ghastly head, those grave reproachful eyes, would haunt her day and night. Whether she died repentant, or whether her heart was hardened, by sinking deeper and deeper into sin, to hush the voice of conscience and the pangs of remorse, we cannot tell. But if unrepented of, we are sure this fearful deed must have sunk her soul into the deepest abyss of destruction.

Here I would say a few earnest words of warning against places of worldly amusement, such as dancing saloons, which are full of peril to the young. Teach your children, as you value their souls, to shun such places. Keep them pure in body and in mind, or, like the damsel of whom we have read, you will be as morally guilty of their soul's death as she and her mother were of John the Baptist's murder.

And let me conclude by pointing out here as forcibly as I can, how sad, how dreadfully sad a

case is that of a child whose parents are, like Herodias, their counsellors to do evil; who instruct them, and encourage them in sin, and set them bad examples. The evil nature that is born in them will be only too readily quickened by bad instructions. "Children, obey your parents," it is said, but "*in the Lord*," not against Him and His precepts. If a parent commands a child to do what is wrong, the child must obey God first.

Are you ever guilty of this sin, my dear mothers? I mean the sin of causing your children to obey you in what you know to be wrong, helping you to carry out some unlawful practice, such as breaking the Lord's Day for some possible gain or profit. And even if you do not force them into sin by your direct command, there are many, I fear, who allow it without check. Oh, surely we are bound by the sacred responsibility of motherhood to *restrain* our children from all sin, not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but, if needs be, by correction also.

But, above all, let your own life of devotion to God's honour, and to His service, be seen by them, and they will soon tread with you the narrow road that leads to everlasting life.

X.

THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN;

OR,

The Reward of Faith and Humility.

X.

The Syro-Phœnician Woman.

Matthew xv. 21—29.

WE have in these few verses an account with which we all, as mothers, can fully sympathize. Let us examine closely all the incidents connected with the circumstance.

Far away on the Phœnician coast, perhaps in a small cottage by the sea, that poor woman dwelt with her afflicted daughter. We are not told whether she had a husband, or other children, nor is her name mentioned, doubtless to bring out into stronger notice the plain facts of the case,—the deep cause of her distress, and the miracle that was wrought in her behalf.

She had, at least, one daughter, this we know; and *she* was afflicted and “grievously vexed with a devil.”

This possession by an evil spirit we read of as having been frequent in the days of our Lord’s

sojourn upon earth. From the time when our first parents hearkened to the voice of the tempter, and the Devil became prince of this world, he had kept his dominion undisturbed over the souls and bodies of men. But now that the promise was about to be fulfilled, that "the Seed of the woman" should "bruise his head," the Evil One appeared to make a more marked, and, as it were, final struggle, to maintain that power which he knew would soon be wrested from his grasp.

Think then, my dear mothers, what that poor woman's sufferings must have been, as she witnessed the awful power which so controlled and overcame her child, rendered helpless by that unseen enemy, who often led her to injure, and perhaps almost to destroy, herself.

We can judge by our own feelings when we see *our* little ones suffering from far smaller maladies, be it some wound, or burn, or perhaps some sad accident. Which of us would not far rather suffer it all herself, if only her child might be spared?

With what surprise, then, and hope, must that poor sorrowing mother have heard of a wonderful Stranger, who was passing from city to city,

effecting such marvellous cures. In the neighbouring land of Gennesaret persons were crowding to Him from all parts, to touch even the hem of His garment, and all were made whole. Let us fancy what such news would be to us, dear friends, just now. Do we each think of some loved one at home,—a husband, parent, child, or sweet babe. How we would take them to be cured by this gracious Physician! No money to be paid, and therefore none too poor to go to Him! He bade all welcome, nor turned away from the worst case ever presented to Him. With what feelings, then, must this Canaanitish mother have hastened to find Him. Her child was too bad to be taken to Him, it is true, but she would go herself, and plead on her behalf for help.

Nor had she far to go. See her with eager haste, as she inquires of each passer-by whether they could tell of hope for her miserable daughter, and guide her to Him whom she sought. At last her efforts are crowned with success! Along the dusty road she sees a multitude approach, and as she draws near,—though she cannot get very near Him for the crowd,—her despairing voice is raised again and again, lest the opportunity so eagerly sought should be lost. Hear her

word as she lays her trouble before Him: "O Lord, Thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil!" Mark, she asks no favour, she claims no mercy, she simply casts it all into His hands to heal as He sees best.

But what is this we see? He heeds her not, but passes by! Can it be that He hears her not? or is it that He *will* not notice her? Again, as she follows the crowd, she utters her piteous cry, till those nearest the Lord came and besought Him to stop and give her what she wanted, so that her troubled voice might cease to disturb them.

Her anxiety tells her that they are pleading in her behalf, and she gathers courage as hope returns, and pushes her way through the crowd of by-standers. Not heeding the response of the Master as He replies to His disciples, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," she falls at His feet in the utmost despair, fearful lest He should even now pass her by.

Can you picture her as she lies prostrate and clasps Him by the feet, with tears streaming from her eager eyes, uttering her bitter wail, "Lord, help me"?

Notice, she does not say, my daughter, but *me*, "Help *me*." Yes, *we* are helped in the persons of our children, their troubles are ours, their joys are ours: when they receive any good, do not our hearts rejoice? I see by your faces, my dear friends, that you echo this thought, you *feel* the truth of it.

Listen, then, to the manner in which her petition is received, fancy yourselves in her place, and learn a lesson from her faith.

Is it a rebuke that falls from those gentle lips? Can that tender heart refuse to hearken to the cry of woe? It would *seem* so, for He replies discouragingly, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs:"—as though He would say, The Jews are my people,—my children. I have come to save and to cure them, for they are my own and have a right to my aid, but *you*, you do not belong to the Jews, but to the Greeks: you have no claim upon Me; we despise all who are not of our religion as dogs; it would not be fitting to waste my mercy on such as you! Oh strange, unlooked-for words! How they would stagger the poor trembling, anxious mother!

But let us listen to the sequel. Love is strong;

a mother's love strongest of all, and well-nigh unquenchable! Once more she pleads; she stays not to contradict the declaration; she resents not the comparison with the dogs. For her child's sake she will put up with ignominy and contempt, so that her request be granted. And she replied, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table;" and if even they, in their low estate, are allowed the crumbs, this is all *I* ask: one crumb out of thy fulness, Lord, one word from Thy lips, and my daughter shall be healed. Marvellous faith! Wondrous importunity! Well dost thou deserve the object of thy intercession!

"Oh woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

And now, O ye mothers, are ye like this woman, strong in faith? do you take your requests to the great Hearer of prayer, feeling, as she did, the reality of your need, and urging your case with that earnestness that knows no denial, and heeds neither delay nor rebuff? Perhaps you say you have no such need. Some there are, I see as I look at your harrowed faces, who know what it is to have even just such need as had this poor Canaanitish woman: you have loved ones at

home, lying perhaps incurable, of one or other of the many forms of sickness to which our flesh is subject. Upon such I would urge the necessity of taking your case to Him who alone can help you. He does not always see fit to answer your prayer at once, any more than He did the mother of whom we have been speaking. But do not give up. In His own time and His own way He will send you the needed help; and what He does not remove He will give you grace to bear.

But not alone to such as have these temporal sorrows do I now address myself. To *all* of you, my dear friends, nay, to myself also do I speak. Have we not *all* a malady? are we not all, not only in a *general* sense, but in some *particular* sense, possessed, even "grievously vexed, with a devil"? Some homes too often are rendered miserable, and their peace disturbed, by some demon or other. Methinks I see yonder a room, which tells of utter neglect and destitution, all brought on by the spirit of Drink,—that great demon of our land,—it may be, possessing the father, and thus rendering the mother hopeless and heartless, neglecting her home and children, or forced to leave them to seek a pittance from the hands of strangers.

But it is not the fathers alone who become possessed by this dreadful demon; for oh! sad to relate, and shame to our sex! too many are the cases in which the mothers—yes, and often quite young mothers—are to be seen fast chained by this hideous monster. What, then, must be the home? The father, if he follows not her steps, which so often leads to strife, and perchance even to crime, must almost inevitably be driven to other scenes of vice and self-indulgence, to the utter destruction both of body and soul. Let us then urge you most affectionately and most earnestly, as you value your own happiness, both here and hereafter, and not only your own, but that of those you love, wage war against this demon of strong drink, nor ever allow your children to yield to its wily charms.

But this is not the only evil spirit with which our homes are often devastated. His name is Legion. Each one of us has some *one* against which to struggle. It may be we have a violent and passionate temper, or perhaps a sulky one; an untruthful tongue, or else a love of backbiting others. I need not name more; these are enough to show you that when we are controlled by some evil tendency, or in the habit of yielding to some

particular sin, *then* it is that we are led captive by the tempter, *that* is the evil spirit by which we are possessed. Search your own hearts, then, dear friends; you will find there, if you do it honestly, the demon that lurks within.

And having discovered your enemy, go in the spirit of this poor woman, not only with the general cry for deliverance from *all* your sins, but specially for deliverance from this, your most besetting sin. Jesus will not turn from you, even though He may try your faith. He loved you so much that He came to seek and to save you. He knows the weight of your sins, because He bore them all, when He died for you on Calvary. And now He simply bids you come to Him with all your woes.

Cast yourself, then, low at His feet, tell Him you have no help but Him; He is able and He is willing to deliver you from all your sins, even the worst, and He will reply, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

XI.

THE MOTHER OF ZEBEDEE'S
CHILDREN ;

OR,

No Cross, no Crown.

XI.

The Mother of Bebedee's Children.

Matthew xx. 20—23.

IT is generally believed that this was Salome. She was, at any rate, one of those women who attended Christ and ministered to Him of her substance, who stood watching His last awful sufferings on the cross, and who, having witnessed His burial, was amongst those who were first at His tomb on the Easter morn.

Now we may feel sure, from all this, that she was a true-hearted and faithful believer in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps, too, as she is thought to have been the cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus, it may be that James and John hoped that she would have had some special influence with Him, and that He would not deny her request, and therefore they persuaded their mother to be their advocate.

Now at first sight it may seem to have been a

very good request that the two disciples made, and also a very natural thing to have sought their mother's help in making it. It is a right and good thing when children can and do come to their mothers, more especially with all their anxieties and wants concerning their souls. They do this often enough in worldly matters, but I wish it were more common to find children pouring out their spiritual needs to their mother's ear, and seeking her prayers in their behalf.

My dear mothers, do you encourage your children to speak to you about these things, to tell you their difficulties and their wants, and do you pray with them and for them, directing and leading them to the feet of Jesus?

Now although we may think well of the request, and though it certainly had some good points about it, yet it was not wholly to be approved.

There was a great degree of faith in the request, because it showed their implicit confidence in the fact of Christ's kingdom. Notwithstanding all He had just told them of His sufferings and death, they were quite sure that He would reign, though they were mistaken as to the character of that kingdom.

Now it showed their ignorance that they should still expect a temporal kingdom of pomp and splendour, when Christ had so often predicted for Himself only suffering and degradation. Well might Jesus reply as He did, "Ye know not what ye ask."

And then, further, believing in that kingdom, they did not even ask for employment or service in it, which should always be our desire and aim. They simply sought for honour, position, and grandeur, in this imaginary kingdom; they asked to be the highest, to be placed above every one else, "at Thy right hand and Thy left."

Now this evinced great pride, great ambition, which is a sin that easily besets us all, and against which we must all of us strive most earnestly. Pride in worldly matters is bad and sinful, but it becomes doubly so when evinced in things concerning our eternal welfare, and the honour of Christ's kingdom. They knew not that the way to that kingdom, and to those much-desired honours, was by a path of suffering and service. "What will Thou have me to do?" is the more fitting question, when only bracing on the armour, girding on the harness for the fight and the race.

It will be time enough at our journey's end,

when putting off our Christian panoply, and laying down the cross at Jesus' feet, to consider and enquire, "What shall we have?" Let us seek rather the grace to bear the cross than the honour of the crown.

Christ does not, however, find fault with them or check their faith and hope, but He gently leads them to the thoughts of the sufferings they must first endure, if they would be close to their suffering Saviour. He puts them in mind of the hardships that were before them, and the great difficulties that lay in their path. He asks, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" You talk of the great things you expect, but are you able to suffer first, even to endure unto the end?

You see, Jesus compares our troubles and difficulties in the heavenly road to a cup to be drunk, to a baptism to be baptized with. It is a cup, to some a very bitter cup, and one that must be drunk to the dregs. But it is not of "fire and brimstone" (Ps. xi. 6), which is the portion of the wicked. But though bitter to the taste, still there is comfort in the thought that it is a cup in the hand of a Father, and that it

is *only* a cup, not an endless, fathomless ocean, to overwhelm and drown us.

And then again let us remember, that to drink of this cup is to share it with Christ. He has drunk it before us, "leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." We must be partakers of His sufferings, if we would be sharers of His glory.

It is good for us each, my dear friends, to put this question to ourselves, whether we are able to drink of this cup, and to be baptized with this baptism.

You say, perhaps, that you have plenty of troubles and trials, more than you know how to bear. I dare say it is so, but it does not follow that they are the cup of Christ's sufferings. Perhaps your trials are only worldly and temporal, brought on as the consequence of sin, not as the fruits of a life devoted to the Master. Or perhaps they are the loving chastening of a heavenly Father to bring us to Christ, and not the cross we are to expect on the narrow path of life.

Perhaps you feel that you would like to be Christians, but you cannot face these trials; or if you have entered upon the narrow road, you are surprised to find you have so much to bear,

whereas you expected all would be smooth with you. If so, you are like James and John: you wish to have the honours and glories, without the cup of suffering or the baptism of affliction. Nay, my friends, it cannot be so; Christ bore it, and so must you. No cross, no crown!

Sit down, therefore, and ask yourself this question, "Am I able?" And for your children too. Do you shrink from seeing them suffer? But would you have them lose the glory hereafter? The sufferings of this present time are very light in comparison with the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" which awaits them by and bye.

But beware of answering too boldly, "We are able." Count the cost. It would have been better for these apostles if they had said, "By Thy strength we shall be able." But they were self-confident, and trusted that if they had the willingness, it must betoken strength. They were like Peter, who thought himself so strong, yet proved very soon how utterly weak he was.

How plainly and positively Christ foresaw their sufferings! "Ye *shall* drink of the cup," ye shall suffer. This He knew and this He could promise. But the request was still left ungranted con-

cerning the future, He left them in the dark about their reward.

“It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”

Now we shall do well, each of us, to consider whether we and our children are in the road that leads to eternal glory, and let us not look upon our crown in heaven as by any means earned, or ours by right, because of what we have given up or done for Christ. It is true we shall lose nothing eventually by our dedication of self and all we possess to Him; nay, by being willing to give it all up, if needs be, for His sake, for He has promised that we shall have manifold more, both in this world and in the world to come. But it is those who not only give up for Him, but who follow Him in His path of pain, that shall inherit the glory. To follow Him is to drink of His cup. Remember that it is “through much tribulation that ye must enter the kingdom of God.”

Are you prepared for this suffering, this passing through the furnace? Christ has gone to prepare a place for us, even a mansion in the skies. Shall we not be willing to prepare ourselves, and to be prepared by God, for that

holy place? "Shall we receive good at His hand and not evil?"

Let this thought comfort you, if there are any tried and suffering children here, that your trials are all known to God, and are sent in love to prepare you as gold is prepared in the furnace, and that soon your troubles will be over, and then will come all the glory of that bright kingdom. And to those who are *not* on the Lord's side, I would say that, although trouble and sorrow are sure to be your lot, *you* will not have the great peace and joy of knowing that they are preparing you for the glory that shall be hereafter. They are only an earnest of what you must expect throughout eternity!

Will you come to Jesus now, and bring your children to Him too? Seek for them and yourself the best gifts; but ask not to be raised above others, nor ask as if your request were a demand you had a right to. Seek it all of free grace. Rejoice if you may hope even for the lowest place in the kingdom, and let your whole life be one of preparation for it.

Live for Christ now, and His glory. Confess Him boldly before men, and He also will confess you before His Father and the angels in heaven.

XII.

ELIZABETH;

OR,

Walking in all the Commandments of the Lord.

XII.

Elizabeth.

Luke i. 6.

WE have before us, in these few words, a description of the character of the parents of John the Baptist.

They were both of them godly and pious, and gave their son the great benefit of a religious education, which, of course, helped to prepare him for the important post which he was afterwards to fill in proclaiming the arrival of Christ, and the approach of His kingdom. A religious training is most certainly a great privilege, which we cannot sufficiently estimate. It is doubtless true that very many are the cases where pious parents, like David, and Jacob, have children who turn out bad and ungrateful. Yet Christian parents may well take encouragement from the case before us in their efforts for the good of their children. If in the one case they were blessed

to the good of the children, why may they not be in another?

Now let us carefully consider the character given of these pious parents, that we may strive, by God's help, to be the same. They were "righteous." They sought and found God's sanctifying grace to keep them holy here, and to fit them for heaven. Notice, it says that they were righteous *before God*. He knew everything about them, not only their acts, but their motives, and the very secrets of their hearts, and He pronounced them righteous in His sight. Many are thought righteous by men, are considered very good, and upright and religious; but when they appear before the bar of God they will prove to be very far from righteous in His sight.

And others are righteous in their own eyes. They have a very good opinion of themselves, but they will be found lost and guilty at the last day.

But Zacharias and Elizabeth were "righteous before God." They knew their own sinful state by nature, but they sought His grace, and they were accepted in His sight. They may have been thought over-righteous in the eyes of men, but they were approved of by Him.

It is stated, too, that they were *both* righteous. They were of one mind and heart in the matters of religion. What a blessed thing, but, alas! how rare, when both husband and wife are found walking on the narrow road, helping each other on, so that their union is not only for this life, but an eternal union in heaven!

The next thing said of them is that "they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." They *walked* in God's laws. They did not only talk about religion, but they practised it in their daily lives. What they knew to be right they endeavoured to do. And they were active in their religion, not standing still; doubtless labouring in the Lord's vineyard for the good of others, and striving to make known the way of life to their neighbours. And they kept on in this way, they persevered even to the end. By God's grace they were enabled to continue steadfast to the last. And the way in which they walked was God's way, "the commandments and ordinances of the Lord." Some like to go their own way; some the way of the world; some the road to fame or prosperity. But they sought none of these; it was God's way, and His alone, they travelled.

“In all the commandments.” Not keeping this or that commandment and neglecting others, but striving honestly to obey all; and this, we may be sure, not in the letter only, but in the spirit. And they walked also in the “ordinances.” They were not satisfied with carrying religion into everything they did in their private lives, but they also honoured God’s house and attended His public worship. They studied the Scriptures, and offered the sacrifices that the law of Moses ordered. How different is this sort of religion to what we see now-a-days, when people strive to observe as few of the ordinances as they can,—or keep some and neglect others!

Neither was their religion of that easy sort, which is so common, which lets people live as they like all the week, so long as they go through certain outward observances on the Lord’s Day. The attending God’s House—the observing all the rites of the Church—these are nothing unless they are carried out in the daily life of the week.

Finally, it is said that they were “blameless.” No one could bring anything against them which was inconsistent with the religion they professed. It should be a great object with us to bring no harm to the great cause of religion by our incon-

sistencies or our ignorances. The world is ever ready to criticize and find fault with anything in us, which they would allow in any others. So we must strive to be circumspect in our lives, so that we may adorn the doctrine of God in all things. Yet let us take heed, lest we are tempted to seek the good opinion of men, rather than that of God. We must strive to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men.

Now while we consider the characters of these good persons, and see how they walked and led their son, in their everyday life, let us look for a few minutes to ourselves and see if this character applies to us. Are *we* walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless? If not, what is our condition in God's sight? Are we breakers of His commandments? and do we allow our children to be the same? Are we despisers of His ordinances? Then are we unrighteous, and we have no blessed hope for the future, no high prospects for eternity!

Remember that these two persons were but humble mortal men like ourselves,—two poor sinful persons,—with far fewer spiritual advantages and means of grace than we have. And what grace made them it can make us. If our spiritual

privileges and advantages,—our opportunities,—are infinitely more in number than theirs, the question should rise in our hearts, How do we improve them and profit by them? Are we much the better for them? Look over your lives, my dear friends, and see if you are walking in God's commandments? Do you strive to please Him, in thought, word, and deed? Do you let all men see that you are His disciples? And, above all, do your children know it? And are you bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Your example, your precepts, your prayers in their behalf, are benefits of which eternity alone can tell the full value.

And as you consider your own ways concerning God's ordinances, can you feel that God will pronounce you blameless? Do you attend His house as often as you should, as often as you possibly can? Do you follow the service with your hearts and not with your lips only? Do you approach the Lord's Table as He bids you, to take that Holy Sacrament in remembrance of Him and what He has done for you? Do not you want grace to help you in your daily trials? Do not you wish to begin a new life more in accordance with His will? Come, then, and

kneel before Him, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort, and He will supply all your need.

Do you read His Word as often as you should? and do you cast yourself at His footstool constantly for help? and do you bring your children to Him early and dedicate them to His service, and then train them up to walk in His fear all their lives? If so, happy are ye, my dear mothers, for God's blessing will rest upon you all your days.

But a few words, in conclusion, to those of you who do not *profess* to be walking thus in God's commandments and ordinances, who make no pretension to religion, or to be thought righteous. My dear friends, do take heed, and consider your peril. The Bible asks, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Oh, dreadful thought, there is no hope for you if you should be called away impenitent and unconverted!

Hear the Saviour's voice now calling you to come unto Him and be saved, while yet there is time. Delay no longer, I entreat you! You know not the blessedness of being one of His loved ones,—those whom He has received and pardoned. Come to Him now. He will not cast

you out, and He will help you to walk in the way of His commandments to do them.

And bring all your little ones to Him too. Think what a happy thing it must be to look forward in joyful hope, not only for yourself, but also for your husband and the children that God has given you, to a glorious eternity all together.

XIII.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN;

OR,

The Compassion of Jesus in Affliction.

XIII.

The Widow of Nain.

Luke vii. 12.

WE see before us a very sad picture. A funeral is always something sad and serious, and one from which we might always learn a solemn lesson. How many of these warning voices pass in their grim stateliness every day! Not one of us can say, if the call should come suddenly to *us*, that we have had no warning. If no other voice should be raised to urge us to repentance, before it be too late, this surely should awake us from our sleep of sin, as it utters the warning words even silently to our hearts, "Prepare to meet thy God."

We see here a funeral procession as it issues from the gate of the city. In the East, and in the days we are speaking of, they did not bury as we do now. No coffin was required, but the body was carried on a sort of shutter, lightly

covered with a cloth, on the shoulders of men, to the burying ground, which was generally just outside the precincts of the city.

In this instance they were conveying to its burial the body of a young man, who appears to have lived alone with his widowed mother, the joy and support of her declining years. And now the poor woman has the bitter anguish of following him to the grave.

We read that "much people of the city was with her." Such an event as this generally, even in our days, gathers a large number of lookers-on; and though some may have collected out of idle curiosity, I cannot help thinking, from the especial notice that is taken of the crowd, as accompanying the sorrow-stricken mother, that she must, with her son, have been held in much respect by her neighbours. And now her distress calls forth from them much sympathy on account of her loneliness and bereavement.

How touching must have been the scene! The sacred historian seems to have felt the utter solitude of that already bereaved woman, when he says of the dead man, "He was the *only* son of his mother, and she was a *widow*."

But lo! as they slowly wend their way, they

meet another concourse of people, coming towards the city; and as the two processions meet, there is a general pause.

One there is on whom all eyes are centred, as He casts a look of deep compassion on the sorrowing mother. Then, with a voice thrilling with emotion, He bids her not to weep. And as He speaks thus, her heart revives, her hope is raised, and she looks up with new-found faith on Him who has thus spoken the first words of true comfort to her soul.

Then the Stranger turns to those who carried the body of the young man, and with a touch as of one in authority, He desires them to stand still. And now His voice is raised. To whom now does He speak? even to the young man himself, in the far-off land of departed spirits whither his soul has gone. See! he is moving,—that corpse, lately so cold and stiff in death, is now moving,—“He sat up and began to speak.” The mother is too thrilled with wonder to stir; she can scarcely believe the sight is real, till that same loving and compassionate Friend, who had recalled her dear lost son to life, now brings him to her and restores them to each other.

Such is the story recorded in the Gospel, the

simplicity of which is so natural and so touching. As we read it carefully, we hardly know which strikes us most, the utter wretchedness and misery of the childless mother, or the loving, tender compassion of the gracious Saviour.

Are there some here who feel themselves as forlorn as this poor mother? You know what it is to lose loved ones too! The garb of mourning tells too truly that some of you have passed through similar afflictions. Some have felt the loss of the one who was the stay of their house, the light and joy of their life. But God has in His own unerring wisdom seen fit to call him away, we cannot understand why! It may be that his sufferings were so great that we can feel that it was good for him to be released from them, but yet the blank is still the same to *us*.

And then when your hearts were scarcely healed from this sad blow perhaps another stroke was sent, it may be stroke after stroke, and one by one your darlings have vanished from your sight, till the very light seems gone from your inmost soul.

When you lost the last, was there no voice to breathe comfort to your heart? Some, perhaps, were not thus utterly bereft, but had still one

left who could say, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?"

Whatever your woe, and however deep, take comfort from these tender words of the loving Saviour, "Weep not." As was Christ's compassion for this poor widow, so is His compassion for you now.

Notice its promptness. No sooner does He see her in her distress than He comes to re-assure her. When He appears to delay, as He did at the grave of Lazarus, we may be sure He has some wise purpose in it. He does not willingly or needlessly add one pang to a sorrowing heart.

But, perhaps you say, it was different in the case before us, when the mother was so soon to be restored to him for whom she was mourning. True; and yet to you, sorrowful mother, even now He says, "Weep not." It is not that He would rebuke you for showing natural affection, neither does He approve of hardened callousness and want of feeling. But He bids us not to weep as those without hope. "He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." And this leads to a far deeper and more solemn thought,—even *this*, that there is another

death than that of the outer and mortal man, of which the death of the body is but the type—I mean spiritual death, from which, if a man be not rescued in this life, he shall, without doubt, perish everlastingly.

Consider, my friends, for a moment, what are the signs by which we know a man to be dead. You will readily describe them. He moves not, he neither breathes, nor speaks, nor eats, nor hears, nor feels; he is utterly unconscious of his own condition, and responds not to any effort made to restore him.

So, too, in a higher sense, with the man who is dead in trespasses and sins. He, too, is unconscious of his own state of danger, nor cares for the admonitions or advice of his truest friends. He speaks not for God's glory, he breathes no word of prayer or praise, he hearkens not to the word of God, nor does he hunger after heavenly food.

Such, then, is the state of many among us, who may truly be described as dead indeed. And such, moreover, they will remain until the awakening voice of Jesus shall strike upon their deafened ears, and bid them rise and live.

My friends, has He met *us* on the road to the

tomb, when perhaps we have been as unconsciously carried along on the tide of worldliness, utterly indifferent to our awful condition,—perhaps, too, being followed by the tears and prayers of a loving mother, or other fond friends? *They* may see our danger though *we* know it not ourselves. Are there any of you, I solemnly ask you, like this young man? Or let me change the question. Have you, oh mothers, children over whom you have reason to mourn, deaf to all voice of remonstrance from you, and blind to their danger? If so, weep not as those without hope; there is a Helper near; Jesus of Nazareth is passing by; He is present with us now. He knows your trouble even before you tell Him. Look up, then, to Him, and lay your care upon Him. Take your loved one in prayer to Him, that He may reach the hardened heart, and bid your dead arise and walk.

And I will close by pointing out to you how considerate the loving Jesus was to the now happy mother. He does not ask her to give up again her newly-found son, by bidding the young man to follow Him, but He gently restores him to his mother! He knows how her whole support depends on the son whose loss had been such a

bitter bereavement to her. He does not bid the young man leave home and neglect its duties; or stifle natural feelings and domestic affections, as if by doing so he could better do honour to his kind Friend and Saviour.

No, my friends, it is in our homes, and in our own family circles that God, having placed us, would have us endeavour to let all men see that we are His children. And by the conscientious fulfilment of all our daily duties, and the consistency of our home lives, we shall glorify our Father in heaven: for Jesus says, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit."

Seek, then, ye mothers, that your homes may be sanctified by the presence of the Saviour, and that your hearts may be cleansed and purified by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Daily take to Jesus the burden of sin or sorrow that oppresses you, and you will find His ear ever ready to listen and His heart ever willing to send an answer of peace.

XIV.

SAPPHIRA •

OR,

Lyng and its Punishment.

XIV.

Sapphira.

Acts v. 9.

IN the history before us we have an account of an act of gross hypocrisy and attempted deception, on the part of a man and his wife who were professing members of the early Christian Church.

In the latter part of the preceding chapter we are told of the unity and unselfishness which existed among the first converts, so that "they had all things common." "As many as had possessions of lands or houses sold them, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." And yet we come now to a very sad side of the picture. There is generally a mixture of bad even among the good of every sort, and hypocrites are to be found among every body of believers and professing Christians.

Now let us consider closely the sin of these two persons, the nature of their deceit, and the fearful consequences that followed. The first sin, which was the root and cause of their evil conduct, was love of praise and renown. They saw how nobly and unselfishly other Christians were acting, in giving up all they were possessed of for the good of the community, and wishing to attain to the same degree of notoriety and esteem, and to be regarded as very eminent Christians, they planned together to gain for themselves a great name for piety and generosity, when in reality they had neither. With this idea they sold all their possessions, and having received the price thereof, instead of taking the whole sum to the Apostles as the others did, they conceived the idea that no one would be able to tell how much they had made by the disposal of their goods, and therefore they could without detection keep back part of the price. But that Holy Spirit which is the discernor of the intents of the heart, knowing all that had passed, and the deceit and unbelief that lay hidden from mortal eye in the heart of Ananias, discovered the fact to St. Peter as soon as the deceiver appeared before him. So when Ananias brought the money and laid it at the

Apostles' feet, the act silently implying the sacrifice he had made, St. Peter at once, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, taxed him with his secret hypocrisy:—"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? . . . Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God." These are most solemn words, my dear friends. Lying is one of the chief sins which the devil puts into our hearts. It is utterly contrary to, and at distinct variance with, the Holy Spirit of God, and when once yielded to, the Holy Ghost departs from a man, and Satan may truly be said to *fill* his heart with all ungodliness. We are not told that Ananias uttered the deliberate lie in so many words, but his act implied it, and his equivocation and keeping back part of the truth was, in God's eye, as bad as the direct lie. As St. Peter well said to him, he was under no necessity of selling the land, and even having done so, he was not bound to bring any of the money to him for distribution. Had he done so honestly, not professing to be so overgenerous, God would have accepted his offering, and there would have been no guilt in the matter. No offering should be given to the Lord grudg-

ingly, but of a free will, for "God loveth a cheerful giver." But it was not of the smallness of his gift that St. Peter complained, but of the sin in his heart. He might have succeeded in deceiving man, and had not the Spirit revealed it to the Apostle he probably would have done so. But God is not mocked, He knows all the secret intentions of the heart, and He read plainly the guile and deceit in Ananias and Sapphira. His awful fate is quickly told. He died on the spot, without warning,—“he fell down and gave up the ghost.” He was made a solemn example then, in this early time of the Apostles’ ministry, to vindicate the honour of the Holy Ghost against whom he had lied, and to maintain and support the inspiration and authority of the Apostles, for if they could not by that Spirit, with which they had so lately been invested, discover and expose this deceit, how then could they be supposed to be able to reveal and make known the secret things of God?

But now we must turn to the final scene in this sad and awful tragedy. Three hours have passed away, but no one seems to have conveyed to his wife the sad news of what had befallen her husband. Unlike too many of the present day,

this little body of Christians appear to have been unwilling to become the bearers of such sad news. At last Sapphira appears on the scene. We are not told whether a secret misgiving had seized her, or whether, in the pride of her heart, she came hoping to share the praise and honour which she supposed Ananias to be enjoying. She had at least had this space of time to have thought over and repented of her sin.

It is indeed a good thing to see husband and wife joining together in any plan that is good, anything that will be a real benefit to others, free from all self-seeking or aggrandisement. But here we read of just the reverse, self was all they thought of,—the praise of man rather than the favour of God. Am I addressing any who feel in their hearts that such is the case with *them*? Do you seek to be thought better Christians than you really are? Do you even sometimes sacrifice temporal things and deny yourselves, not from love to God, but that others, seeing your acts and apparent piety, may give you praise and glory which you know you do not deserve? Oh, my dear friends, hear the solemn words of the Apostle, “Ye have not lied unto men, but unto God,” and you know that the Scriptures em-

phatically tell us that no liars shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Fearful is your doom if this is a description of your guilt! But what if this guilt be a preconcerted plan between husband and wife! *She* was not guilty alone of acting the lie, but in reply to the question put to her by St. Peter she deliberately adhered by word of mouth to the same falsehood. "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much, and she said, Yea, for so much." You see, as St. Peter said, they had "agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord."

How sad it is to see those who ought to be walking together on the heavenly road, who should encourage and support each other in good works, rather plotting and planning together deeds of wickedness and fraud. The union, which in the case of husband and wife should be a most sacred and blessed tie, thus becomes indeed a bond of iniquity. My dear friends, this ought not so to be. I know not if it be the case with any of you, but most sincerely do I trust it is not so. Would it not be far better if, at the commencement of the temptation, a few words of gentle but firm remonstrance from your lips were fearlessly uttered to check it?

I believe in far the greater number of cases, where men are planning some of the dreadful deeds of darkness which are so fearfully rife in the present day, a few seasonable words of kind expostulation from the wives would so influence them as to save them from sin, and perhaps from ruin and death.

O ye wives, will you not stir yourselves to save your husbands, by your loving influence, by your gentle tones, and by your upright and truthful lives? Are you professors of religion as was Sapphira? do you even, perhaps, make a more marked show of your profession, and yet are you acting in secret in such a manner as to deceive your fellow-creatures, having no real religion in your hearts? With what motive do you attend God's house on the Lord's day? Is it because you love Him, and desire to pour out in His ear all your troubles and difficulties, and to praise Him for all His past goodness to you? or is it rather that you may be seen of men, and be praised and honoured by them? You may, indeed, get the reward you seek, but oh! beware of such a line of conduct; you may deceive men, but you cannot deceive the all-knowing and all-searching God. He sees the most secret and hidden re-

cesses of your heart ; He knows the intentions and the motives of all your acts ; and will one day make them bare to the eyes of an assembled world, when your doom will be irrevocably fixed. And those who have joined together in iniquity in this world shall share the same fate throughout all eternity.

XV.

LYDIA;

OR,

The Lord Opening the Heart of the
Willing Hearer.



XV.

Lydia.

Acts xvi. 14.

TWO verses contain all that we have recorded of this pious woman, but there are several points that we shall do well to notice attentively, and by which to profit. We are not expressly told whether she was a wife or a mother, but it *is* said that she was the head of a household, and as such, she had certain duties and responsibilities, which are ours also, dear friends, and therefore we shall be wise to take home to ourselves the lessons taught us by her example.

What do we learn first concerning Lydia herself? The two chief points are her calling, and her religion. She is described as "a seller of purple." This was her trade, and no doubt an honest one, but still only what might be termed an humble one. By the special mention of it we

may learn, I think, that we need have no shame of an honest calling, however mean it may be considered by others, so long as our conduct is not mean. There is far more cause for real shame in those who have no calling at all, but who eat the bread of idleness. Since the fall of man God has ordained that man shall live by the sweat of his brow, and St. Paul tells us, that if any will not work neither shall he eat. Let us, therefore, dear friends, guard against a false shame about this matter. Let us strive not to be ashamed of our calling,—of our having to work,—but let us endeavour, by our uprightness and faithful discharge of the duties which fall to our lot, to ennoble our work, and to elevate ourselves by the otherwise humble calling. But, further, I think that by the notice taken of the occupation of Lydia we may gather, that though she had a calling to attend to, yet it did not so pre-occupy her as to cause her to neglect her religious duties. How often do we find people who make excuse for neglecting God's house, and for absenting themselves from His worship, because they have a business to attend to, or some occupation which it is evident they consider much more important than the honour of God

and the salvation of their own souls. But we see here, that if a calling be lawful and *right*, it can be made consistent with our religious exercises, and that if it cannot be made so to agree, we shall do well to suspect that there is something wrong and unlawful in the avocation and calling which we have adopted.

Lydia was not a native of this city of Philippi, but of the distant one of Thyatira, and had taken up her abode at Philippi, possibly as a place of more trade and business than her native city. This brings us now to consider the second point of which I spoke at the commencement,—her religion. She was a proselyte, one who had already learnt to give up the worship of her false gods, to serve the true and Almighty God of heaven and earth. She came among the other devout women on the Sabbath day to the place, out of the city, by the river-side, where prayer was wont to be made. But she was not yet a believer in Jesus Christ. She observed the ordinances of the Jewish worship as far as she could, and it was in these very observances that she obtained the blessing which is the greatest that any heart can receive. We shall do well to notice that this great blessing,—this opening of the heart to

revealed truth, true conversion of soul,—is not only necessary for the openly wicked or the neglecters of God, but for those also who have some degree of light, and who are even professors and observers of religious duties. It is not enough to worship God and to keep His commandments. All this should be done, it is true, but this is not enough without the opening of the heart by God's Holy Spirit to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ask yourselves, then, my dear friends, whether the Lord has thus opened *your* hearts. You attend God's house, you meet together, as at the present moment, to pray to God, to hear His Word explained, but unless His Holy Spirit opens your hearts to attend to the words spoken, they shall profit you nothing. Rest not, I pray you, in any outward forms. Let the *heart* first be right with God, its door open to all the softening influences of an indwelling Spirit, and then indeed will you receive the truth as it is in Jesus. Is Christ knocking at the doors of any of your hearts to-night, dear mothers? Does He seek to enter in that He may fill your souls with light, and peace, and love? The change that you need, that you know that you need, must be in the

heart, and it must *begin* there. Turn no longer from Him, I pray, but yield now, this very night, to His softening influence, and He will not only open your heart, but your ears, your lips, your hands, shall also be included in the blessing.

But mark now the effect that this work of God in her heart had upon Lydia's life. "She attended to the things spoken of Paul," she not only listened to them, but applied them to herself. How many persons do we meet with, dear friends, who approve of the words spoken, but are ready to apply them to their neighbours, to any one rather than themselves! Now it is one great proof that our hearts have been opened, and that they are under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, that we more diligently than ever attend the means of grace, not only hearkening to, but earnestly attending to the Word read or preached, improving ourselves thereby.

Again we see another effect of her new state of heart, that she wished all in her household to share the blessing. She sought the welfare of their souls, she desired that they might at least be included in the covenant of grace, and by bringing them within reach of the Gospel ordinances, she trusted they might also, as she

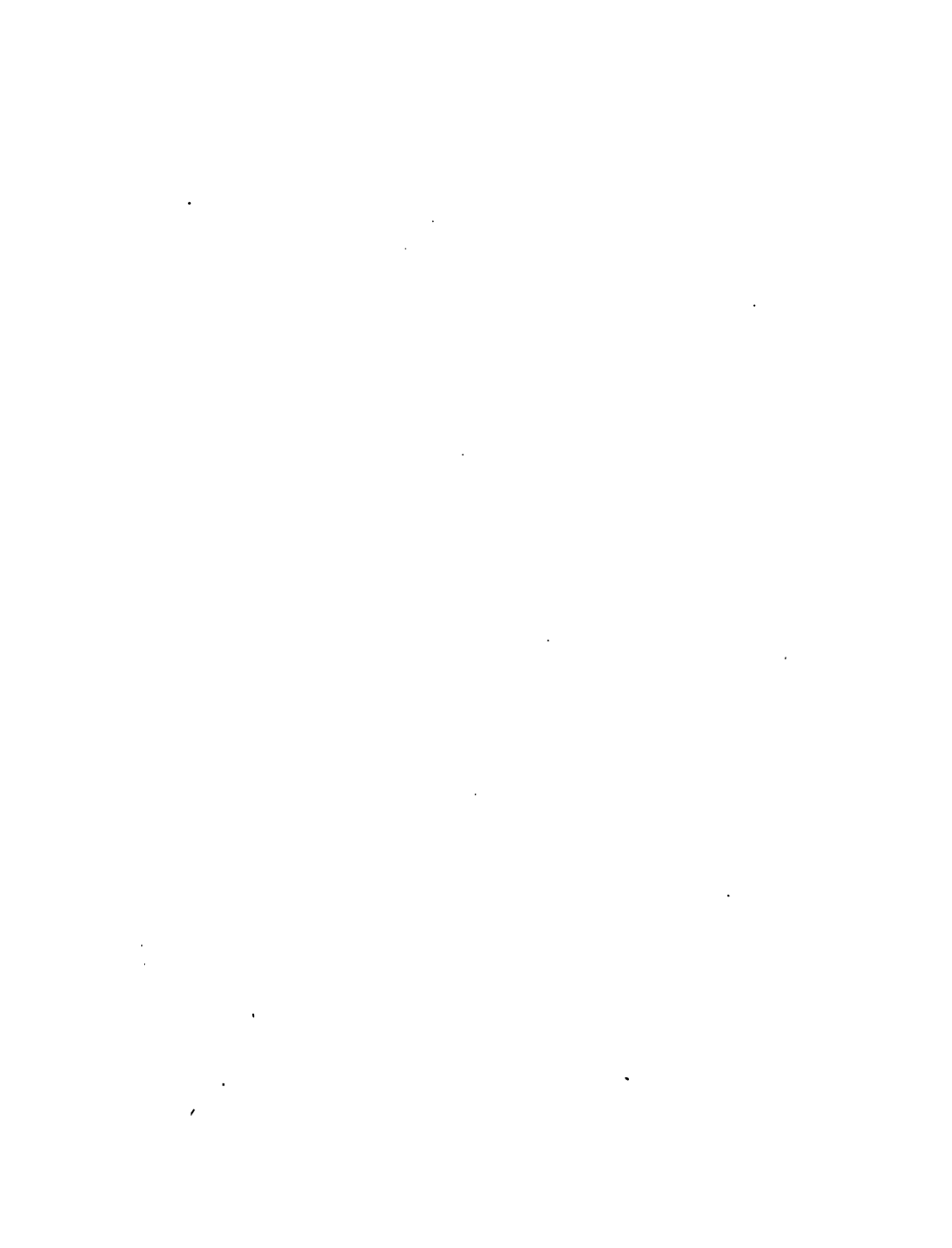
herself had done, be blessed and benefited by the outward means.

And now, my dear mothers, do you, too, see after the spiritual welfare of all those with whom you are connected, and over whom you have any control? First, have you received the blessing yourselves? and do you now feel the high privilege of the outward observances and ordinances of religion? Then do you see that your children and your whole household do the same? Do you attend the house of prayer? and do you bring them there? Do you bring them in baptism into covenant with their God? or do you neglect this, though Christ Himself bade His disciples to go and baptize all believers? And do you, farther, such at least of you as are truly striving by God's grace in the heart to live religious and consistent lives,—do you approach the Lord's Table, and partake in faith of His Holy Sacrament? It is in the due observance of all the means He has given us that we may hope for, and expect, a blessing. Observe that the occasion under which Lydia's heart was opened, was no time of particular excitement, no special season,—merely an ordinary Sabbath day, at one of their usual little meetings, and that doubtless only a small

one; and yet there, on that quiet Sabbath morning, God's Holy Spirit descended into the little company, and finding one waiting anxious heart, It opened that heart, and came in and dwelt there.

That same Holy Spirit is here now in our midst! Can He find such a heart as Lydia's amongst us? Will you, my dear mothers, not accept Him to-night, that the words which have been spoken in so much human weakness may, by His Divine influence, be carried home to each seeking heart? Let us look for a blessing whenever we meet together in the ordinary means of grace, and however few our numbers. We know not when or how, but His still small voice shall speak peace to our hearts if we only seek it in humble faith. May He grant that some of you may receive this inestimable benefit, even this very night; and may not only you, but your whole households, reap the benefit and share the blessing.

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